

# Deer Industry News

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## Next Generation Programme

HALDON STATION AND MELIOR VENISON HOST EMERGING TALENT

## Making a Difference

NORTHERN HAWKE'S BAY COUPLE MAKING SMART CHANGES FOR ENVIRONMENT

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Three year old Velvet Stags - 2018

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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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**Cover:** The stage is set for Summer Cervena to shine at the Cologne Fine Food Days. See page 30.

*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

# We're in a good space

**IT'S BEEN A** testing year for deer farmers – all livestock farmers in fact. On the plus side, venison and velvet are performing well and the financial returns are healthy. However, the country's focus on farming's environmental footprint, particularly regarding freshwater quality, greenhouse gas emissions and – coming soon – native biodiversity on private land, is creating uncertainty and anxiety.

Recently the Government released a discussion document, *Action for healthy waterways*, that proposes major changes to farming activities with the aim of reducing farming contaminant loss to water bodies. There are challenging proposals, with high hurdles for farms to overcome when considering:

- changing 10 hectares or more into more intensive uses within a farm (e.g. converting >10 ha of scrub or forestry into pasture)
- environmentally "risky" activities such as feedlots (and wintering sheds), sacrifice paddocks, winter grazing (especially on hills) and irrigation
- having to exclude deer and cattle from waterbodies on "low-slope" land or steeper land above 14 stock units per hectare
- meeting tighter in-stream targets for nitrogen and sediment and, in some catchments, operating under a nitrogen cap with requirements to reduce nitrogen losses.

You may be feeling confronted by some over-the-top regulation of how you farm. My message is this: Don't despair. We're in a good space to meet these challenges and if anyone can find a way through this, we can.

There is a lot of detail in the proposals – not all of it practical or based on science or logic (e.g. setback width or pugging depth requirements). There is a much more straightforward way to achieve the Government's aims for freshwater. And we could do so in a way that is less prescriptive about inputs (do you have 5 metre setbacks along your streams; are your stags in a barn for 80 or 81 days over winter) and more about good outcomes (my stream runs clear; the housed stags are well fed; there is no soil damage or waterway contamination).

Key to this is development of a Farm Environment Plan (FEP) that identifies environmental risks on the farm, prioritises them in terms of impact and affordability and then takes cost-effective actions to lower the risks.

The proposed regulations could all be covered under one FEP. It could explain why we choose not to fence some waterways ("the risk is low because the paddock is not used all the time; low stocking rates; sediment traps and wetlands installed downstream"). Similarly it could explain why we can winter graze on sloping paddocks ("wide, 4-day breaks, a run-off paddock or forestry block with baleage; a buffer strip at the bottom of the paddock"). In short, this means describing the practices that many of us are already doing as a matter of course and providing proof that we are.

DINZ will be submitting on the proposals and seeking to remove some of the more arbitrary, prescriptive requirements and pushing for more focus on desired outcomes.

Farmers can commit to completing an FEP and then following up on the actions identified. Even if your first version is not perfect for 2025 (when some of the regulations take effect), you'll still be well placed for ongoing discussion of environmental challenges. DINZ will continue to support deer farmers through P2P Advance Parties and Environment Groups. We are in this together and we can help each other meet any expectations that society places on us. ■

– Ian Walker, Chair, Deer Industry New Zealand



Ian Walker.

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# Step changes to sustainability

Transformational changes over the past decade to create a productive and self-sustaining system at Haldon Station were shown on an informative afternoon excursion by participants in NZDFA's 2019 Next Generation programme.

**MANAGER PADDY BOYD** talked about the challenges in driving through the most significant change during his 38-year tenure, moving Haldon from breeding and store stock to breeding and finishing and achieved largely through the development of centre pivot irrigation.

It was a huge triumph in an arid and extreme environment, where the temperatures can dip to -20°C and peak at 40°C in summer. It was hard but healthy country and as irrigation has proven, highly productive with the addition of water.

Irrigation has been part of the Haldon system since the mid-1970s when water was allocated to farmers as part of the Upper Waitaki hydro development. The Innes family, owners of Haldon at the time, took up an allocation to eventually establish 460 hectares of border dyke irrigation which worked on a pneumatic wragg system. Although efficient and providing some summer feed security, it wasn't enough to assure the finishing of young stock.

In the early 2000s the decision was made to increase the area watered by investing in centre-pivot irrigation. The first 120 hectares in 2002 transformed a home block area that struggled to support ½ a sheep a hectare. Since then, another 650 hectares has been added and 10 pivots, including a moveable one, installed. Next Generation visitors got to see the 320 hectares under development on decommissioned border dyke land which would support another centre pivot. It might well be the last irrigation development at Haldon.



Paddy Boyd (left) talks to Next Generation visitors.

“We’ve really had to push ahead with the irrigation over the past decade because of the increasing ECan regulation which has made it more and more difficult to get consent,” Boyd said.

The water-fed changes had created a more diverse and flexible finishing enterprise, where half of gross income was now generated from 15 percent of the farmed area.

Gross farm income since 1991 has increased at 5 percent per annum (compounded), farm working expenses by 4 percent and

EBITDA by 6.7 percent. Irrigation, improved feeding and genetics have all played their part.

Further analysis of production and returns over the past eight years showed the changing influence and likely future role that deer, fine-wool sheep and cattle would play at Haldon.

On a stock unit basis, Merino and halfbred sheep, and deer, each accounted for 40 percent, with cattle (Angus and Hereford) accounting for 20 percent of returns.

Deer produced about one-third of output and earned the highest EBITDA per kg of product sold (\$8.33), compared with sheep (\$5.29) and cattle (\$2.26).

Sheep are the most efficient converters of grass to meat in terms of kg product per kg liveweight, at .32, compared with cattle and deer both at .23.

Boyd said he was mindful of creating a balanced and sustainable system where there was not over-reliance on one particular livestock class or income stream. For this reason the Merino ewe flock would be held at about 6,500, therefore reducing the impact of volatile fine-wool prices. However, halfbred ewe numbers would likely increase from 2,500 to about 3,000 because of the potential to finish more lambs under irrigation. The number of deer and cattle would also increase. On paper, cattle had the lowest EBITDA/kg of product sold of \$2.26, but that didn't account for the valuable role they played in pasture management, Boyd said.

“The whole thing about the development is to make us self-sustainable and give us flexibility around the climate given our relative isolation. We also want to create a bigger operation that will attract the right people to make it work.”

## Haldon Station fact file

**Location:** Mackenzie Country

**Owners:** Klisser family

**Manager:** Paddy Boyd

**Employees:** 10

**Land:**

- 365 – 1525 metres asl
- 20,000 hectares
- 6,000 hectares freehold home block of flats and low-lying hill country where the deer are run, includes 200ha border dyke and 800ha pivot irrigation.
- 7,600 ha of leasehold partially developed higher country for sheep and cattle
- Balance is oversown tussock country

**Livestock:**

- 26,680 SU total
- Merino and halfbred sheep: 10,495 SU
- Red deer: 10,373 SU
- Angus and Hereford cattle: 5,812 SU

## Watershed moment

A turning point for irrigation at Haldon was the ECan renewal consent process for irrigation in the Mackenzie Country which started in 2009. Boyd applied for consent renewal under border dykes but was turned down because it was deemed inefficient and potentially damaging to the environment through nitrogen and phosphorous leaching. For consent to be considered and granted, spray options were needed.

The securing of water for a sustainable and productive farming system at Haldon and for other farmers in the region has led to high-profile conflicts over the past decade. An epic row erupted during the 2009 irrigation consent renewal process when it was discovered that Meridian Energy had, unbeknown to land users, revoked a long-standing clause giving farmers affected by their developments water allocation for irrigation. After a long battle involving High Court action, the clause was reinstated. Farmers formed the Mackenzie Irrigation Company and Haldon Station has enough shares in the company for about another 100 hectares of development. Boyd would like to use this for a final development but is aware of the difficulty of getting consent.

Water management and meeting regulatory requirements and expectations well beyond the farm gate was the new farming challenge, Boyd said. He had tried to walk towards rather than away from the issues it had created and encouraged Next Generation farmers to do the same.

“You have to prove you’re doing the right thing with the weight of evidence such as science-backed data and photos; it’s so important that you document things.”

Water quality testing at 14 sites helped validate Haldon’s credentials for responsible land and water management. Another tool was nutrient budgeting. Starting in 2009, this showed nitrogen losses were an estimated 6kg/ha and phosphorous a negligible 0.1kg/ha. More significant, given recent environmental discussions, was a calculated greenhouse gas (GHG) output of 40kg per kg of product. This figure, calculated and explained by Andy Macfarlane, provided the basis of an indicative 5c/kg that deer farmers might have to pay. This was based on the proposed ETS at 5 percent of GHG per kilogram (5 percent x 40kg) at \$25/tonne (2.5c/kg).



Most of the border dyked area at Haldon Station has been replaced by centre-pivot irrigation.

*continued on page 6*

**PRELIMINARY  
NOTICE**

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*Sustainability: continued*

## Deer farming tradition

Haldon Station is a micro-community at the end of a 40-kilometre side road veering off Dog Kennel corner on the Tekapo–Fairlie Highway. At its hub is a modern and well-appointed corrugated iron-clad accommodation annex and “cook shop”. Nearby is a small school that serves Haldon and other farming families along the road. Although isolated, Haldon is relatively handy to Tekapo and is well placed for boating on the Upper Waitaki lakes, and skiing, hunting and tramping in the Mount Cook and surrounding alpine hill and tussock country.

The Station’s long history started in the late 1850s when Dutch immigrant Thomas Teschmaker took the lease of 20,000 acres and named it after Haldon Hills in Devon where he had previously lived. The landholding grew and after several changes in ownership was bought in 1919 by the Innes family, a tenure that lasted 70 years. In 1991 Haldon was bought again by Dutch immigrants, this time Hans and Jenny Klisser who had built a successful Auckland-based bakery business. The family takes an active interest in Haldon but leaves management to Boyd, who oversees the 10 employees.

The deer farming connection started in the late 1970s when James, grandson of the original Innes owner, started with a herd of helicopter-recovered animals from the back blocks. Since then there’s been ongoing and heavy investment in genetically upgrading the herd. The improvements led to the establishment of an on-farm breeding programme where the top-performing animals were selected for an elite breeding herd.

The Haldon deer herd comprises 3,200 red hinds, 500 velvetting stags and sires, and 2,800 replacement hinds and finishing stock. The above average-sized hinds, typically 125kg, thrive in the low- to mid-altitude hill and briar country. They come off the hill in mid-August giving it a chance to regenerate, before returning in October until post-rut weaning in early March. The hinds stay about a month on the irrigated area to gain condition before mating. They exit Haldon at seven years of age to keep up the momentum of genetic progress.

The velvetting stags are by far the biggest contributors to Haldon’s deer income. They are low cost and easy care, spending most of the year on the hill blocks, supplemented with balage in winter, then barley following button drop. Last year the 500 stags, two-years and older, cut an average of 5.8kg.

Haldon used to run about 1,300 stags but cut numbers because of the time Paddy had to spend in the shed during velvetting during an already full-on time of the year. However, there are plans in place to entice a deer manager (a new home is under construction) and increase the velvet herd, a development Boyd made a point of mentioning to the Next Generation visitors. ■



Deer at Haldon Station. Photo: Jamie Ward

# P2P podcasts on genetics

**IF YOU’RE TOO** busy to sit down and read about bringing better genetics into your herd as the sale season approaches, Passion2Profit has the answer for you: “Keen on Genes”, a podcast series that takes you through the story of deer genetics and how you can put your own herd on the pathway to improvement. The six podcasts, each a “bite-sized” six to eight minutes, are introduced by award-winning broadcaster Susan Murray and were produced by Susan with *Deer Industry News* Editor, Phil Stewart.

Episode one covers genetics 101, with industry experts Geoff Asher, Jamie Ward and Sharon McIntyre explaining how superior genes get to work in your breeding herd. The next episode digs a little deeper, explaining how breeding values work, and how that translates to value in dollars and cents.

The series then explores the genetics that go into terminal and maternal sires, with some ideas about where your investment can go, depending on your breeding objectives.

In the fourth episode, Sharon McIntyre talks over breeding objectives with Otago breeder and finisher, Tony Chittock. They discuss the farm system that he and wife Debi have developed on their property and the breeding objectives that will allow them to make the best use of what they can grow in this environment. It’s where the genetics rubber meets the farming road.

Episode five takes a different angle, this time from the perspective of the customer. Susan Murray talks to Duncan New Zealand’s procurement manager, Ray Coombes. He explains what they and their end customers are wanting their venison suppliers to produce, and the role that good genetics plays.

The series is rounded out with a bit of fun in a “mythbusting” episode, wherein Geoff, Jamie and Sharon address some of the old myths and misconceptions about breeding and genetics.

Videographer Pete Drury also took some great video during the recording of the series and we will also be producing a short “Keen on Genes” video summary of the series for those who prefer some pictures with their words.

You can listen to the podcasts by going to [www.deernz.org/media/podcasts/keen-genes](http://www.deernz.org/media/podcasts/keen-genes) or download the episodes from the website directly onto your smartphone so you can listen while you’re out and about.

This is our first venture into podcasts to help get essential information on productivity out to deer farmers and we’re looking forward to your feedback once you’ve had a chance to listen. And with the sire sale season almost upon us, now is the perfect time to focus the mind on your investment in genetics.

Funding for “Keen on Genes” came from the Passion2Profit Primary Growth Partnership, a joint venture between Deer Industry New Zealand and the Ministry for Primary Industries. ■



Host for “Keen on Genes” is veteran rural broadcaster Susan Murray, pictured here out on the job recording for RNZ National’s “Country Life”.



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### OTHER SIRES REPRESENTED

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BOMPHUR  
DUKE ROBIN



# Rapid development and deer expansion at Melior Venison

Day two of this year's Next Generation Programme saw delegates descend from the Mackenzie Basin to Melior Venison, an 800-hectare partially irrigated property east of Fairlie where Tom and Samantha Macfarlane with Tim and Sarah Turner plus a team of young staff have driven a rapid development programme.

**IN JUST OVER** six years, deer have gone from 10 percent of the farming system to 80 percent at Melior Venison (formerly reported in *Deer Industry News* as The Kowhais) in the rolling hills between Fairlie and Pleasant Point, South Canterbury.



Morning muster: Next Generation delegates gather in the yard at Melior Venison, South Canterbury.

The rapid development programme has also seen stock units wintered lifted from 7,000 to 11,000. Poor quality ryegrass/browntop pasture in the paddocks has been replaced with high-performing herb and grass mixes while hill blocks of browntop and scrub have been broken in with heli-cropping and hoof and tooth techniques.

"We've put in 100km of deer fencing and 95 percent of the farm is deer fenced now," Tom Macfarlane told the Next Generation visitors in his opening comments.

The Macfarlanes run the farm, which is owned by John and Melinda Macfarlane, with the help of farm manager Tim Turner and three other permanent staff. They also have a 50 percent stake in, and manage, the 490-hectare former Deer Improvement business in Southland, now branded Melior Genetics.

They're a young team, with Tom the oldest at 31. Farm manager Tim is 27, having joined the business as a shepherd on leaving Lincoln six years ago. The other three are all in their teens or early twenties.

"I'm quite committed to employing young staff," Macfarlane said, "both for their attitude and because I believe we need to 'give back' to the industry, not just sit and complain about lack of staff. We've got to train people."

Macfarlane noted they had to ensure their employment offer



Melior Venison's team, from left: Hamish Brown, Tom Macfarlane, Mitchell Cross, Maddi Palmer and Tim Turner.

was compelling compared with dairy, where rosters locally were now more often five and two, rather than 11 and three days on and off. Being able to offer reasonable accommodation was also important and they'd converted part of the unused woolshed to a new two bedroom flat in order to be able to do that.

They try to minimise weekend work, but winter feeding and 180 hectares of irrigation including guns, a roto-rainer, a lateral and K-line, means someone is needed seven days a week for most of the year.

A 50,000m<sup>3</sup> pond installed when they took on the property has allowed that irrigated area to be increased from 140 hectares without increasing their shareholding in the Opuha Water irrigation scheme. The pond provides flexibility, allowing them to take 100 percent of their 65 litre/second allocation continuously

## Melior Venison key points

- 80oha (65oha effective, 18oha irrigated) mixed country near Fairlie, South Canterbury.
- Major pasture and fencing development past 6 years – now 95 percent deer fenced.
- Deer: 1,200 hinds, 4,000 weaners, 60 sire stags.
- Beef: transitioning from Friesian bulls to beef herd plus finishers.
- Sheep: lambed 400 annual draft ewes. Replacement with hinds likely.
- Fescue, clover and plantain permanent pastures.



while actual use on farm ranges from 0–100 litres/second. It also means if they get unexpected rain they can turn irrigators off immediately but still take and store water already released from Lake Opuha on their behalf.

“There’s a 36-hour lag for the water in the river to get from the lake to the farm,” Macfarlane explained.

The irrigation is all on one side of the farm and mostly goes on light river flat soils, with a little available for application through gun and K-line on heavier clay terraces. The whole area is used to grow winter crops and high-quality finishing feeds in a roughly five-year rotation.

Direct drilling is used extensively, including for fodder beet, to minimise cost and environmental risk from erosion both at planting and feeding. The savings come not only in operations, but also in agrichemicals, notably herbicides.

“We spent \$436/ha on [fodder beet] chemicals last year whereas it was \$700/ha when we cultivated,” Turner pointed out to the field day.

Beet yield this winter was disappointing at 16tDM/ha due to a very wet spring and early summer but with 13–14tDM/ha of that eaten at a total growing cost of \$1426/ha it was still competitive.

“The previous year we did 21t/ha down the throat ... we did spend a little bit more but it was still under 10c/kgDM,” added Macfarlane.

To date they’ve mostly grown soft, low drymatter types, such as Feldherr, fearing harder varieties could cut hind longevity. Macfarlane noted his deer in Southland, which are the same genetics as at Melior Venison, and on very similar soils, have much worse teeth. This, he suspected, was down to historic grazing of HT Swedes, which were particularly hard.

“It’s the only thing I can put my finger on for the difference. By nine or ten years they’re pretty gummy.”



Fodder beet is direct drilled to minimise risk of soil loss – at sowing and grazing.

All hinds are mouthed at weaning and any substandard animals are culled. Talking to people around the country he finds those who don’t mouth hinds often also have higher empty rates and a lot of lighter hinds.

“Farmers are aiming for longevity but sometimes they’re robbing Peter to pay Paul: they’d be better off biting the bullet and replacing them with good quality young stock.”

The longer hinds are kept, the slower the generation interval so the slower the genetic gain, he added. “It’s all about finding the right balance.”

From just 700–800 weaners when they took over the South Canterbury farm, it now supports 1,200 hinds and finishes 4,000 weaners. They’re looking to increase the breeding herd to 1,500, reducing reliance on buying in weaners and the risks associated with that.

Hill blocks on the south side of the farm – the far side from the irrigation – have been fenced so they each open directly onto a lower-lying paddock making it easy to move stock from open, high-quality pasture to rougher grazing and/or more cover.

Macfarlane said a lot of the farm is marginal for fawning and long-term he’d like to have some fawning cover in every paddock with a patch of sparsely planted trees, preferably a species favoured for browsing by deer.

Hawke’s Bay farmer and DFA Executive Committee member Grant Charteris noted over-stocking and hinds fighting for fawning spots is the biggest contributor to fawn losses, and



A stop to view hinds on fodder beet spurred a discussion on mouthing and longevity.

*continued on page 10*



## FOVERAN DEER PARK

BREEDING THE DIFFERENCE

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*Melior: continued*

Macfarlane added that in Southland last year he'd deliberately lifted the mower for about 20m occasionally when cutting silage to leave long patches randomly dotted across the paddock ready for fawning.

"It looked terrible, but when they were fawning you'd see the hinds running back to these patches ... I think it worked because our fawning percentage was a lot higher than the previous year."

Monitoring of stock performance is facilitated by EID tags and data recording on FarmIQ or, in the Southland business, Mihub.

"You've just got to pick which package is best for you but the point is, information is power," said Macfarlane. "If we don't record what we're doing now, how are we going to know what progress we've made in five years' time?"

Charteris echoed that, adding such packages also make compliance with farm assurance schemes much easier.

"Use the technology to your advantage," he urged the Next Generation attendees.

Charteris also revisited the employment and staffing discussion that had kicked off earlier on the farm tour, warning delegates "there's a fine line between expectation and reputation" for young staff in the industry and reputation had to come first.

Build that, through hard work, good decisions and smart networking, and opportunities would follow.

Macfarlane, who has been to Lincoln to speak to students about opportunities in the sector, said he'd always try to find room in his team for the right person.

"There's a very good career in managing farms."

## Fescue preferred

Pasture development at Melior Venison has seen most paddocks sown in fescue rather than ryegrass, typically with some prairie grass included to boost winter/early spring growth, plus 5kg of red clover, 3kg of white clover, and 4kg of plantain.

Fescue is preferred for its greater drought tolerance – 60cm root-depth as opposed to 30–40cm for ryegrass, Macfarlane noted – and productivity in the heat of summer.

However, the fescue mix is only deployed once a paddock has been through a couple of years of red clover or other forages to ensure weed grasses and old high-endophyte ryegrasses are eliminated.

"There's no point spending a heap of dollars on a fescue mix if you're going to get a whole lot of weed grasses coming into it," Macfarlane told the field day, reflecting on fescue's slower establishment than ryegrass.

They've found with careful management – not grazing for more than five days and never "hammering to the ground" – they can make red clover stands last several years. And it doesn't matter too much if the clover stand gets a bit long, added Macfarlane. This is because forage quality is still reasonable thanks to clover stems' ME of about 10MJ/kg, unlike ryegrass where the ME drops dramatically once it runs to seed.

Nitrogen fertiliser is used sparingly on pasture, typically just 30kgN/ha applied early in spring on the non-irrigated land to help get things away, often going on with the annual maintenance fertilisers. On irrigated land in pasture, three or four top-dressings of 60–70kg/ha of urea is the norm.

Forage crops for ensiling, such as barley and peas, and pure



Tom Macfarlane photographed earlier this year showing the type of pasture mix they are now favouring at Melior Venison.

stands of red clover for ensiling and/or finishing stock with, are also grown under irrigation.

## Bulls out, cows in, ewes going?

Having finished Friesian bulls for five years, a 150-head beef breeding herd is being built up to replace them in the stock mix by buying in heifers and also breeding their own from dairy-beef cross heifers put to Angus bulls. The dairy-cross heifers will be sold for beef as once-bred heifers after the calves are weaned.

While the Friesian bulls were profitable, the cows and followers would be a better fit with the deer operation and consequently more profitable overall, Macfarlane told the field day.

Also on the way out, it seems, is the ewe flock, which has gradually been pared down as pastures have been improved and deer fencing extended. From a flock of 2,500 when they took over the property six years ago, just 400 were lambed this spring and none of those were from the original flock.

"We've been buying in annual draft ewes for the past three years."

## Deer health regime

Hinds at Melior Venison get an annual seven-in-one clostridial booster, copper bullets, and iodine pre-mating but are never drenched or, if they have to be for welfare reasons, they're subsequently culled.

All weaners are drenched with a triple-active during autumn and closely monitored for lungworm, with an injection of selenised vitamin B12 given at the first drench post weaning.

Home-bred weaners get *Yersinia*, Leptospirosis and clostridial (Covexin) vaccinations, plus copper bullet. ■

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# “The older you get, the less you know”

The 2019 NZDFA Next Generation programme was hosted at Haldon Station in the Mackenzie Country on 26 August and featured a valuable workshop on Succession Planning – a topic that is in hot demand by Next Generation attendees. This coverage comes courtesy of DINZ Producer Manager **Tony Pearce**, who was on hand to record the discussion and excellent presentations by former DINZ Chair **Andy Macfarlane** and later by Peer Review’s **Tony Hammington**.

**ANDY MACFARLANE’S ADDRESS** related to preparing for farming career progression, career positions, equity growth, pathways to involvement in land, stock and farm management, and ownership.

The discussion focused on:

- the power of compound interest and collective capital, and optimising productivity
- land purchase, land involvement (bearing in mind that only 20 percent of those involved in agriculture and land are in ownership positions).

Macfarlane stressed that the current Next Generation are the real drivers of change. They have widely differing expectations and plans, but these all combine to have a strong impact on where agriculture and livestock farming is heading.

Looking for opportunities with a positive lens and expectation is key, but you must expect that in farming it’s very hard to achieve these goals quickly. Progression in farming is never a straight line and, for many, getting ahead and realising a goal is commonly a journey of more than 15 years with a lot of effort.

Macfarlane said it was easy to get pessimistic just before you start to make progress, and recommended:

- continual small, measured risks rather than one big bet
- avoiding making yourself vulnerable by:
  - focusing on what you can control, especially inside the farm gate
  - looking for diversity of enterprise to spread the risk, because you can often get into trouble in a monoculture.

He said common lessons learnt by young people starting to get on their feet were:

- seek and take external advice from trusted people
- focus on diversity of thought
- the best experiences are enhanced with a team, or collective experience
- long-term success is based on interpreting and utilising good science, good economic principles and keeping up to date with innovation in your field.

Citing the rough economic impact on farming from the Labour Government in the 1980s through changed taxation rules and livestock valuation, he said dramatic changes in government policy can be sudden, brutal and not necessarily well thought through in terms of unintended consequences.

“But it’s important to listen to government signals,” he said.

“The past two years have been an excellent example of that and the potential major disruption to business as usual that is occurring now.”

While the current moves around greenhouse gas emissions were not bad decisions, there would be widespread changes.

## Agribusiness/farm ownership and equity growth

### Reputation is everything!

Your reputation affects your current job and your next one, as well as your ability to access finance, banks and equity growth opportunities.

Macfarlane said reputations are enhanced or judged by how you get on with people, how you transmit your skills and how others get to know, trust and work with you. In a role where your reputation and skills are trusted, you quickly move into a mechanism of collective investment (inputs and outputs) that begin to mean “this is what’s good for us” in management and decision making, he explained.

“Be as professional as you can across the industry sectors you are involved in. Success is not just having few animal health challenges – it’s also about optimal feeding and having a clear and progressive breeding or finishing vision.”

### Cash flow is king

Negative cash flows have a huge impact on management style and decisions and income. Punting on capital gain over time is not a good philosophy.

“You should not be concerned about taxation,” he continued. “With an investment in farmland you pay interest on your equity borrowings before tax, i.e. these payments are tax deductible for the business. Understanding the tax impact is very important.”

Macfarlane believes it’s important to involve children in the investment from the time of their late teens, keeping them well up to date with business information. He said success in the business requires discipline, especially in times of risk or crisis. “At that time, be decisive and take more considered action. Seek advice to ensure your decisions are well informed and relevant.”

While the deer industry is currently enjoying a period of prosperity and confidence, that should be a red alert too. “Plan and prepare in case a crisis or disruption comes our way, and stay focused if it happens.”

## Farm succession

Two or three generations can all be actively involved in the farm at one time. Today, when a successor is required about half the family members might want to do it while half want to do something else.

Opportunities include:

- Good experience and reputation are investments that can be paired up with capital
- Start saving early. Macfarlane gave an example of a “rainbow” investment for long-term growth. He said if you banked \$10,000 a year from age 20 to 65 at an average of 3 percent you’ll have \$927,000 by 65.

## Summary

Macfarlane said there is a tension between a vision for land ownership and developing a professional career in farming. Today, rural professionals in business are a well-rewarded occupation if you develop the skills. In summary, he said:

- Start saving early.
- Build your skills, competency and a value set that is important to you.
- With land, sometimes you get an opportunity that is just too good to be true. Do the research and if it stacks up, sometimes you should just cash it and take the profits.
- If you just put that cash in the bank, you risk getting scared to take it out. It pays to reinvest on the same market.
- Reputation is your biggest asset. It’s hard to gain a good reputation but easy to lose it. It says how you react under pressure and what your skills, values and ethics are.
- Take calculated risks.
- Always look for a great entry point, think through the challenges, and understand market volatility and risk.
- Utilise sweat equity where the opportunity is offered.
- Borrow amounts that may stretch you, but you can handle. Pay it off, reborrow and establish a record at the bank (remembering that interest paid is pre-tax, not post-tax, so there are incentives).
- A 5 percent return on a 4 percent borrowing is a “positive carry” but a 3 percent return on 4 percent interest is a “negative carry”. Because land prices are now finally stable, flat or even decreasing, rates of return on capital are increasing and interest rates are falling. Now is the best time in decades to consider borrowing.
- Cash is king.
- Get a range of advice and be prepared to act on it.
- Look for a step change potential in land value. Invest in land that has a potential for increasing capability and adding value to that investment.

## Discussion

A few further good points came out in discussion following Andy Macfarlane’s presentation:

- Your reputation is built from your early years and can be continually improved.
- Develop your people management skills and an understanding of psychology and behaviour so you can encourage the best from people.

- Recommended essential listening/reading: former All White, forensic psychiatrist Dr Ceri Evans and mentor to All Blacks his new book: “Perform under Pressure”:
  - Interview with Dr Evans: [bit.ly/2V9qmlg](http://bit.ly/2V9qmlg)
  - Read the book: [bit.ly/2M8647I](http://bit.ly/2M8647I)
- When extending a good idea it’s important to steer people and the right expert advice together.
- Invest in relationship management and building trust.
- Your CV must be backed up by your reputation.
- Fixed or floating? With current geopolitical disruption it’s hard to say. It might be best to focus on short-term loans and investments for now, but also develop a back-up plan.

## Succession planning workshop

Facilitator Tony Hammington (PEER Review) introduced the succession workshop with an example of Richie McCaw’s uncle having breakfast with his nephew before his stellar All Blacks career started. He asked if Richie could summarise his vision and commitment for the future on a table napkin. Richie wrote simply “GAB” (Great All Black). Hammington encouraged delegates to take that advice to articulate their own vision and passion in a short, simple statement that can guide, direct and inspire them on the path towards that goal.

He introduced the concept of developing a simple lifeline from birth onwards and writing three simple goals. These might include personal, family or business goals.

The key point was getting a simple, clear focus to drive the



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For further information contact Paul Hughes:  
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*continued on page 16*

# Are you making Genetic Progress?

One of the most effective ways to improve profitability on your deer farming operation is through Genetic Improvement. One of the main challenges deer farmers have is to identify the traits that are relevant to their farm-specific breeding objectives and improving on them year on year.

The objective of the **FORRESTER** programme at Peel Forest Estate is to ensure that commercial clients are on a continuous improvement programme within their herds. The **FORRESTER** deer programme at Peel Forest Estate has been making outstanding advancements over recent years, focusing on several key traits that are substantially improving their clients' deer herds.

The days of picking a stag on the one specific trait of 12-month growth (W12BV) are gone. To breed a herd of highly productive, healthy deer, a range of traits needs to be incorporated. Special consideration of ALL traits, quantifiable or not, must be considered to achieve maximum genetic improvement. These traits have a valuable role to play and are the very essence of the Peel Forest Estate-bred **FORRESTER** bloodlines.

The main goals that Peel Forest is continually focusing on with trait selection for the **FORRESTER** are:

- **GROWTH:** Pass on growth rates to their progeny
- **TEMPERAMENT:** Quiet deer + less stress = grow faster and easy to handle
- **HEALTH:** Unique Johne's Resilience and Parasite (High Carla) Resilience
- **CONCEPTION:** Exceptional conception rates over large hind numbers
- **VELVET:** Increased spiker velvet. Average \$91 of spiker velvet equates to an extra \$1.50/kg on venison schedule.
- **REPLACEMENTS:** Produce highly productive, hardy breeding hinds selected from your 'Tops', not your 'Bottoms'
- **KILL OUT:** R1 Stags kill out at +60kg carcass weights, early.
- **YIELD:** 58% LW – Carcass. High EMA with the **FORRESTER**s having the top 4 **EMAceBV** English sires in NZ.

Birth Year	W12BV	WWTBV	MWTBV	CARLARBV	EMAceBV	12mth KG	EMA Trace
<b>Male</b>							
2015	8.28	4.31	6.37	50.02	0.39	116kg	29.2 cm <sup>2</sup>
2016	12.61	6.59	10.44	50.58	0.53	123.72kg	32.83 cm <sup>2</sup>
2017	14.06	7.23	11.08	51.16	0.83	131.99kg	35.43 cm <sup>2</sup>
<b>Female</b>							
2015	10.33	4.38	7.96	9.75	0.18	90.15kg	-
2016	11.53	5.78	9.22	5.23	0.27	98.60kg	-
2017	14.39	7.17	11.38	27.45	0.63	103.16kg	-

The table on the left summarises the quantifiable traits and the genetic advancement of **FORRESTER**s over the past 3 years. (Statistics taken from the top 100 animals in each class.)

The 2018-born **FORRESTER** progeny are flying along. Peel Forest weighed 309 stag fawns on 4 September, and the top 100 averaged 113.5kg with the heaviest at 130kg. The mob averaged 217 g/day over the winter (1 June – 1 Sept) on fodder beet and Lucerne baleage.

This is 6kg up on the previous year at the same time and it's estimated that the average yearling weights at the end of November of the top 100 stags will be around 138kg (based on moderate growth rates of 300g/day).

Below are 'kill out' statistics from two of Peel Forest's clients last season using **FORRESTER** genetics.

Mark & Gill Forrester – North Canterbury		
Date (2018)	Tally (stags)	Average Carcass Kg
26 September	99	59.5
10 October	98	63.1
24 October	100	59.5
8 November	99	58.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>60.15 kg @ 58% yield</b>

David Harper – Highlands		
Date (2018)	Tally (stags)	Average Carcass Kg
17 October	28	62.18
31 October	20	60.77
13 November	21	60.55
27 November	18	61.17
12 December	32	61.20
19 December	9	60.63
<b>Total</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>61.08 kg @ 58% yield</b>

Peel Forest Estate believes that all these traits are testament to the English bloodlines they are using and have been able to build and capitalise on these English deer through rigorous progeny testing, DNA, selection of high EMA sires, CARLA testing and stringent temperament selection. **FORRESTER**s are the flagship for Peel

Forest Estate and they believe that these deer will play a key role in enhancing the sustainability and profitability of the New Zealand deer farming industry.

If you are interested in viewing these **FORRESTER**s, Peel Forest Estate is very happy to show you around. Please contact Mark Tapley on 027 779 9008 or [mark@pfe.nz](mailto:mark@pfe.nz) to arrange a visit.



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## - Venison Genetics -

Friday 6th December 2019  
Viewing 12pm, Auction 1pm

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*Succession: continued from page 13*

journey, review progress and adapt or shape the plan at regular intervals.

That clarity starts the conversations, including the difficult ones, like succession within the family or business.

Hammington invited any of the attendees to the 14 successful workshops on succession planning held around the country to share any thoughts from that experience.

Grant Charteris (Hawke's Bay) said splitting family groups ("stags, hinds and fawns") based around age groups worked well, as the same questions were much more easily discussed in those age and status groups. Feedback had reflected different views, values and expectations. He felt that process encouraged the start of further communication and wasn't as difficult as people may have expected. Just getting the discussion started is tough, Charteris said, but this approach showed that it's not that hard if some prior thinking along these lines is involved.

Hammington suggested that in setting ground rules, ideally there should be no taboo subjects (except maybe some rules about the financial position initially) and no surprises. Any difficult subjects could be put on an agenda with some rules around scope.

He concluded that most of the Next Generation would have family at home and would be starting on the reflection phase of their lives, thinking of more than just their futures. Now was an ideal time to broach the conversation.

If anything such as illness or a career change had altered the timing or relevance of the discussion, this could provide an entry point to the conversation.

If there are other younger family, teenagers particularly, that is the time to start talking, he said.

"Kids enjoy being encouraged on that ride and they quickly spot the important things and the challenging issues. Difficult conversations often occur because the family members that really should have been involved, weren't."

### Good planning is everything

Hammington said the trauma around a sudden death and the need to get things sorted under huge pressure suggests that the conversation should start as early as possible.

His advice: Start the conversation and slowly pick up the direction and detail in pace with the family's understanding. It doesn't have to be delivered in one session, nor as a *fait accompli*.

### Vision: what are we building?

- Clear and simple so it's easy to write down and review.
- Focus on where your business might be in 5 years' time. Ideally you should be able to describe that in a short simple statement to a stranger, so they understand exactly where you are going and what you intend to do.

### And some other pointers...

- In business, typically you embrace three interlinked roles (investor, manager and entrepreneur). Consider the functions of each in terms of vision and assets.
- Dairying has a clear progression pathway, much more than the drystock industries, but the principles are similar. With farm succession, the steps progress at different rates in different parts of a diverse business.

- Equity partnerships in deer farming were a successful model in the early days of the industry. They are not common now but the principles remain and are valid, especially as the industry's future is consolidating and has become less volatile with valuations of stock based on actual productive potential, not speculation or tax incentives.
- The young Next Generation audience is as much about growth in a farming career as being an entrepreneur. Hammington said they have youth and enthusiasm on their side and are valuable because they have skills, capability, relative scarcity, specialised experience, knowledge of increasing compliance requirements, stock sense, a work ethic and established reputation.
- This is a time of opportunity. The average age of farm owners today is 54. That means fifty percent are older and often significantly older than this. We have an increasing reliance on imported labour in the dairy industry with a growing demand for livestock management skills and interest in the drystock sector.
- Take the time to understand the skills required in the drystock sector. Passion for this style of farming should be tempered with the realisation that it's still about profitability, and understanding the real demands of farming and the need to achieve good outcomes.

### Succession conversations

Tony Hammington said too many conversations are framed negatively and are all about "how do we cut up the pie?"

If it is about the positives – energy, vision experience, passion – you can initiate or participate in the conversation and define your values and things you won't compromise on. Grant Charteris commented that working with a business coach he'd learned the importance of articulating real and honest individual values that align with your goals.

### Crucial conversations: Succession planning and family dynamics

The future for all is a high stakes game and for some family members this might be the first time they've seen the business balance sheet.

- Everyone will be looking at the outcome from their own point of view.
- It can be emotional and not all will see it as fair.
- The conversation requires access to facts and clarity of purpose.
- The discussion needs to agree a defined purpose in case the conversation gets off track.
- Try and create a formal, neutral environment for discussion.
- Agree on it and write it down; talk about it with others.
- Change the dynamics so it's an "all-adult" conversation, not parents and children.
- Be well prepared and spring no surprises.
- Responses and questions should be measured and rational.
- If things get too emotional step back and ask a question that requires the thinking part of the brain.
- Further reading: *Crucial Conversations: Tools for talking when stakes are high*, by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan and Al Switzler. McGraw-Hill (2011) ■





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# Top of the class: Performance, pasture and water quality

by Trevor Walton, *Deer Industry News* contributor

Enthusiasm for deer farming and land improvement get Garry Brady up every morning.

**IN THE PAST** five years, Garry and his wife Dianne have expanded the deer area on their 240-hectare Te Pohue, inland Hawke's Bay property to around 160 ha. Deer numbers now stand at 1,000 and ewe numbers have dropped to 500.

Paddocks have been land-formed so deer don't wreak havoc with springs. Traditional sheep pastures have been replaced with mixes designed to keep deer growing rapidly from early spring to late autumn.

This major development programme would not have been needed if the farm had remained largely in sheep. But Garry's increasingly dodgy right knee and a realisation of what he could achieve by "feeding the living hell out of deer" motivated change.

At age 65 and after 40 years of farming on the roof of the North Island, the end of the land development and deer conversion programme is in sight.

At that point – in perhaps three years – Garry hopes to turn his attention to enriching the native biodiversity on his farm. Already his wetlands and creeks are fenced off and teeming with eels. Koura are easy to find. Water leaving the farm is low in N and P, and most of the sediment dug up by deer or running off hillsides is captured in traps of his own design (see p22) or wetlands.

The wetlands are doing a good job, but there's potential to enrich them with native plants. It's a job he looks forward to – he loves the native bush and wildlife – but at the moment there are only so many daylight hours in a six or seven day working week.

For now, Garry's bush fix comes from helping to do predator control on private land off the Napier-Taupo Road, where a viable population of eastern brown kiwi has been established by the Forest Lifeforce Restoration Trust. The 24,000 ha forest is laced with a network of bait stations and traps that have successfully reduced stoat, weasel and possum numbers to near zero. Rats – Garry says they "are continuous" – are a different story.

"It's great doing hard work in the bush with a group of mates. The predator control works – the forest is so full of



Garry Brady with developed deer paddocks in the background. All waterways are fenced, full of eels and koura, and doing an excellent job of capturing sediment and nutrients. Weed control and enrichment with native trees is on the long-term plan.

birdlife you can barely hear yourself think."

Back on the farm there are two main deer income strands, velvet, and potentially the sale of yearling and 2-year old breeding stags to venison breeders.

On the velvet side, Garry has been buying in top sires and mating them to his own line of elite females that for the past four years he has been selecting on the basis of DNA parentage tests.

"A few years ago I realised the heads on many of my farm-bred stags were as big as many of those in the sales, so I decided to be more scientific about breeding my own velvetters," he says.

That has meant keeping the females in his velvet line until they produce stag progeny for assessment. This season he'll have a better handle on which hinds are delivering the goods and be able to have a clean-out.

"You can make a big improvement to your average when you identify and cull the bottom end," he says. "But good velvet breeding hinds are so hard to find. I don't want to sacrifice any of them until I know what their progeny are like."

The Bradys cut their velvet early, in order to maximise returns from both the first and second cuts. On the first cut, the mature stags, 7 years and over, are averaging 3.2 kg – with the tops cutting 5.7 kg. Regrowth averages 2–3 kg. Garry expects the average will jump dramatically next year as a batch of younger, better-performing stags graduate from the breeding programme and the bottom end of the herd is culled.

On the venison side, the Bradys have had access to some of the best breeding stags in the country for growth rate breeding values.

"Since it's pretty easy to identify which hinds have high growth rates, we've made rapid genetic progress for venison without



Young velvet stags, not far away from cutting. They, along with their parents, have been DNA tested, to identify the mothers that are carrying top velvet production genes.

having to do DNA testing,” he says. “In fact I reckon we’ve probably reached the top end of what’s desirable in terms of weight for age.”

Despite the obvious success of the Brady breeding programme, he emphasises the crucial importance of giving deer heaps of quality feed when they need it. With velvet he’s convinced that a lot of the production potential happens when the fawns are in gestation and lactation.

“I’ve always been focused on feed. I know my grasses well and can read a paddock. But you learn something new about deer every year and I’m now more confident about what deer need,” Garry says.

“I don’t let the body condition scores of the hinds go below 3.5. I aim for 3.5 to 4. It’s a fine line – almost undetectable by eye – but if they go below 3.5 they spend all winter feeding, trying to gain condition. If we have a bad year and the hinds lose condition, you see it in their yearlings and you see it in their future velvet production.

“Above 3.5, the hinds are so quiet. Like in the wild, hinds in good condition go to ground during winter. They don’t waste energy looking for feed.”

To ensure the deer get the feed they need, the Bradys’ new pastures are a summer feed mix of chicory, red clover and white clover. In autumn, Garry over-drills this with 15kg/ha of annual ryegrass and if necessary, 5kg of annual clover. The ryegrass grows through late autumn and winter, providing excellent early spring feed which “the weaners do superbly” on.

“In October, I assess the pastures to see whether I need to spray out the annual ryegrass. If I do, the clovers and chicory grow like crazy. It depends a lot on what the clovers and chicory are doing. If, like this year, we are still getting regular frosts there won’t be any growth in the chicory, so I’ll leave the annual ryegrass in – it will give me another couple of months of excellent feed.”

In the first year Garry lets the annual clovers go to seed. They reach the height of a sheep fence. Enough seed is set from that one seeding for the next seven years.

The chicory mix is in Garry’s view a winner. But not being one to take things for granted, a couple of years ago he put a mob of velvetters on quality annual ryegrass – as much as they could eat – as a basis for comparison. They had no supplementation and no hard feeding. The result – velvet cut from the mob was down three quarters of a kilo – told him that stags growing velvet need more than quality ryegrass.

By shifting his deer regularly, the chicory/clover swards are lasting for three or more years before they need replacing. Nor are they cut up by fawns at weaning.

“We wean the fawns and hinds onto chicory in May. The hinds go one way; the fawns go the other; and it’s finished. Stress-free. We hardly have a call.”

With the deer fenced area looking shipshape, Garry’s current priority is to complete the deer development. That means fencing, land-forming, drainage and pasture establishment on about 50 ha.

“Apart from the new fences which – with Dianne’s help – go up pretty quickly, it takes a lot of time, even with all our heavy machinery. But I love achieving things. It’s really rewarding.”

The balance of the farm – about 40 ha – is made up of wetlands and steeper faces that, because of the erosion risk, are unsuitable for deer. The faces will be going into pines for production and possibly carbon credits.



The farm’s deer development programme won’t include the steeper part of this hill, which is better suited to plantation forestry for milling, carbon or both.

The Brady farm is surrounded by forestry, which brings with it the usual annoyances. However, there is a serious issue – possums.

Tb has been found in the district and one of the neighbouring forestry blocks is being harvested. Possums and rats are on the move. “I used to be a possum hunter, so I’m always looking out for their runs and any traces of fur. We have bait stations every 60 metres along the boundary,” Garry says.

“We usually don’t see any sign of them. But when I went spotlighting with the grandchildren last week we shot two. They’d clearly come out of the forestry and gone right past the bait stations without touching them. That’s worrying.

“While most of the bait stations inside the farm are never touched, they’re now being cleaned out on the forest boundaries. I’ll be topping them up every two weeks and spotlighting until the Tb outbreak is sorted and the pest activity eases off.”

Harvested pines also pose another issue. When the trash decomposes, nitrogen is released into the bare pumice soil and travels with the ground water.

Some of this groundwater emerges in a spring in one of Garry’s deer paddocks. “We were testing the streams on the farm. All of them had very low N and P levels, except for this one, which had higher N levels. Then the consultant cottoned on – pines were being harvested nearby.”

Garry will be doing more nutrient testing to get a handle on the influence of forestry on N levels in his groundwater, as well as to get an understanding of what influence his management has on nutrient and sediment levels in the streams leaving the farm. This means that if nutrients have to be monitored in the future he’ll have a base line to go from.

## Getting creative with soil and water

The reliable summer rainfall on the Brady farm means it’s a great place for growing deer. But its pumice-based soils present major challenges that Garry has used his ingenuity to overcome.

The pumice, which is a metre or more thick over most of the property, lies on a thick layer of sandstone, which is divided by fissures filled with papa rock. The pumice is free-draining and is easily eroded by deer feet.

On fence-lines, particularly in holding paddocks near the yards where pacing is an issue, Garry has halted erosion by filling the deer-cut trenches with broken papa rock that he digs out of a

*continued on page 22*

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Brady: continued



In the holding paddocks where fence-pacing deer have cut through the pumice topsoil, backfilling with papa rock has worked well. The papa is easy to extract and crush, but hard enough to resist deer feet without causing injury.

couple of pits on the farm. The papa is soft enough to be easily excavated and broken up, but hard enough to resist deer feet. The papa is quite high in P, which is a small bonus.

Springs are a bigger challenge.

“Groundwater runs along the top of the sandstone and through a layer of red pumice. It moves across property boundaries and can pop up anywhere.

We’ve had a number of new springs appear recently, possibly because of ground movement in an earthquake,” Garry says.

Because deer will dig out muddy channels and

wallows downstream of a spring, he has experimented with using his mechanical digger to create box-like water and sediment traps. We’ll call them “Brady-traps”. The best of these intercept all the underground water in a hollow (or “swale”) and also capture rainwater and sediment running off the surrounding hillsides.

Novacoil drains capture the outflow and feed it underground to a downstream wetland. The worst of the sediment stays behind until Garry removes it using the bucket on his digger. He then leaves it in a pile until it dries into a light, fluffy compost that he topdresses on the flats.

Garry has experimented with various designs but now builds his traps using recycled vineyard posts. The size of the traps



Sediment from the Brady traps is topdressed on the flats once it has dried. It’s light and fluffy like humus.

– roughly 1200mm wide, 2000mm long and 1500mm deep – appears to deter deer from playing in them.

Downstream of the established Brady-traps there is no sign of soil damage – just intact pasture where there was once muddy mayhem.

The success of the traps does not mean that Garry is trying to put an end to wallowing. He sees wallowing as natural behaviour – it helps deer shed their winter coats – but he wants them to do it where pasture damage is minimised and sediment run-off can be captured before it enters waterways.



“Brady traps” intercept springs and sediment at source. The prototype version (left) shows intact pasture downhill (behind Garry) where deer used to create muddy mayhem. The latest version is smaller, simpler and deer resistant. Now it’s in place, Garry will be able to get on with regassing.

In most paddocks he's constructed a small waterhole where deer can wallow. The downstream side is effectively a dam, reinforced with heavy used tractor tyres to protect it from being eroded by deer and cattle hooves. Novacoil drains the dam wall and channels the flow into a nearby wetland where the sediment is trapped.

Getting sediment under control and establishing quality deer pastures have been major challenges on the farm. Thanks to Brady's creative thinking, hard work and use of heavy machinery, the existing deer-fenced area looks a picture.

As a member of the local Deer Industry Environmental Group (DIEG), he's shared his experience with other local deer farmers. Emma Buchanan, the facilitator of the group, says the Bradys have done virtually everything that could be done on the farm to protect water quality.

It just remains for them to do a nutrient budget, which Garry says they will get outside help with. Then they'll put their Farm Environment Plan in writing.

It's probably a reflection of his approach to everything he does, but Garry says if he is going to do a farm environment plan, he wants to do "a professional one".

"All the work we've done to protect our soil and water we've done properly, because it was the right thing to do – no-one was telling us what to do."

But from now on, he'll be taking before and after photos of development work, so he can demonstrate what he's done to protect the environment. Who knows who he will have to convince in the future? ■

## STOP PRESS

### Award-winning southern AP!

Congratulations to the **Southland Environment Advance Party (AP)**. As we were going to press news came through that the group won Environment Southland's 2019 community award for Environmental Action in Water and Land Management.

The AP includes Bruce and Robyn Allan, Nathan Coburn, Pete and Sharon McIntyre, Cam and Wally Nelson, Tony, Michelle and Kate Roberts, Steve Collet, Doug McCall, John and Melessa Somerville, and Jane Chrystal (facilitator). They were praised for their "strong and enduring relationships, which contribute to positive outcomes on and off the farm".

Members of the AP have a Farm Environment Plan up and running and are great exemplars for the rest of the industry as all deer farms work towards having functional FEPS.

Michelle Roberts, who accepted the award on behalf of the group, said they were still thinking about how best to spend the \$1000 prize that came with it. ■



"Genetics has always been close to our hearts. With this business we decided to focus on venison, so weight at 12 months is the key factor for us.

"We want to get weaners heavy, early so we have the flexibility to send them off early in spring or keep them longer to add more weight if the conditions are right."

Sam and Tom Macfarlane  
Melior Venison, Canterbury

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# Joined-up environmental leadership

by Phil McKenzie, Passion2Profit Environment Project Manager

Deer Industry Environment Groups (DIEGs) are at the centre of a project to help every deer farmer have an active Farm Environment Plan (FEP).

**GETTING THIS RIGHT** involves talking about the right things, at the right time, and with the right people taking ownership – sometimes referred to as “joined-up leadership”.

Every movement starts with a leader, but the most pivotal part is when others decide to take action and an idea gains momentum. This is very much how I feel about our progress with DIEGs over the past 12 months.

Taking care of our environment is of course nothing new for the deer industry. There is a proud history of initiatives shown by farmers and the teams that support them as part of a “joined up” industry approach.

The environment group approach looks to leverage what we have learnt from the successful Advance Party programme. Could we get small groups of farmers meeting regularly, supporting and learning from each with a skilled facilitator to complete their FEP? Happily, the answer seems to be Yes!

Initially we wanted to get 10 groups of between five and eight farmers going, and to date we have 14 groups underway.

The groups have taken a number of different shapes and we have been deliberately quite flexible in how they are set up, so long as they are working towards getting an FEP complete or making an existing one more active.

Some groups have started with an environment workshop; another has taken a more traditional field day approach, but overwhelmingly most groups have built trust and support by meeting regularly to learn from, and with, each other. Every farmer has been doing things for the environment, so there are plenty of examples to draw from. Seeing these examples on other farms helps give you confidence, or the solution you were looking for, as part of writing a plan for your own farm.

Farmer leadership and ownership is really important, and the NZDFA in particular has played a critical role in getting farmers along to these groups. A number of farmers are participating in

## Consultant rates DIEGs highly

Total Ag farm consultant Rob Macnab has sung the praises of the Deer Industry Environmental Groups.

Macnab, who helps Waikato farmers compile their Farm Environment Plans, was quoted in *Farmers Weekly* (19 September), saying the groups are “one of the best examples of successful plan implementation”.

“It is staggering how good these plans are,” he said, noting that the DIEG workshops help farmers keep the cost of an FEP down to about \$1,500 with the farmers doing most of the work. This is well below the \$5,000–\$7,500 and hourly rates of \$200 that it can cost using a consultant.



Groups have built trust and support through meeting regularly.

an industry group for the first time, which I find really pleasing.

With the raft of new proposed environmental policies being announced in the past few months, the environment group approach has been a good opportunity to discuss and frame these proposals in a practical (and perhaps more positive) way as part of the overall farm business.

Getting these groups going is a great start, and while we can't yet say we have every deer farmer with an active FEP, we can say we have a proven concept for how we can get there. What seemed to be a courageous aspiration to have every deer farmer with an FEP now doesn't seem so daunting.

We do have farmers keen to join a group if we can find a few others and facilitators who are keen to help, so I'd encourage everyone to think about getting your FEP done this way, and to get in touch. ■

• Contact: [phil@changeforgood.co.nz](mailto:phil@changeforgood.co.nz)





# Stunning Deer Farm with Wapiti Stud

## *Manapouri*

Connemara is an iconic picturesque deer farm situated near Manapouri with the western end of the farm bordering the Waiau River. The farm offers an excellent balance of heavier to free draining soils and one of the farms many strengths is its ability to winter animals to a high standard. Very good internal lane access, fully deer fenced, and sound regrassing history through winter crop system.

Infrastructure is a well maintained main house and separate self-contained one bedroom unit that vendors have rented in the past for BnB. Large deer handling facilities and yards along with full array of other sheds. The development of the property and the breeding build up of the stock over the last 20 years is a credit to the vendors. Stock wintered in 2019 were 458 stags/bulls, 948 hinds, 842 fawns, and 54 cattle. All stock is available to purchase at valuation.

The location is a haven for the outdoors with hunting, fishing, and boating on the doorstep. The vista is spectacular.

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# On-farm proof for breeding values will soon get real

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Three commercial venison producers will soon be starting to see the impact of breeding values (BVs) within their own herds when the 2019 fawning season gets under way.

**EACH FARM IS** using a pair of sire stags with contrasting BVs and has mated them to approximately equal numbers of hinds. The progeny will be DNA matched to the sires and measured as they grow. To highlight the impact of genetic merit on their progress and remove environmental effects, progeny from both sires will be run in the same conditions within each farm.

The trial, while not as rigorous as one that you'd see in highly controlled conditions on a research farm, has the advantage of showing the impact of BVs in an everyday commercial situation.

In the August/September *Deer Industry News*, we profiled David Seifert, who is testing the impact of BVs from two sires in challenging conditions in the central North Island. In this article we talk to the two other farmers involved in the exercise: Duncan Humm and John Hamilton.

## Carluke Deer

**Duncan and Lorna Humm** run 170 English red breeding hinds at Carluke Deer on 43 hectares of flats at Mount Somers in Canterbury, with a small number of velvetting stags and stud velvetting hinds that are part of a separate share farming operation.

Breeding deer in a fairly restricted area that is all flat presents its challenges and the breeding season can be a “game of chess” to keep mating mobs separated says Duncan Humm.

Humm admits that he is a little sceptical about BVs, and is as influenced by an animal's phenotype (results of the interaction between its genetic traits and an animal's environment) as he is by their genotype (their genetic traits alone). He likes to see how the sire itself grows and is a keen observer of animal performance in the field. “In the past I've bought animals that looked good on paper, but didn't deliver.”

He is, however, keen to see how the progeny from two stags with contrasting growth BVs will perform in their environment. The two used for this exercise are leased from Melior (formerly Deer Improvement) and have contrasting BVs. On weaning weight (WWT) there is a 6.3kg difference, which expands to a 13.3kg difference by the time we get to weight at 12 months (W12). (The two stags are +20.6kg and +33.9kg on that trait, see Table 1.)

Conception rates are not an issue for the Humms, with scanning for young and mixed age hinds regularly in the 95–100 percent range. The two stags used in this exercise each looked after 50–60 hinds. Humm says all of the first fawners were scanned in fawn this year, and about 98 percent of the mixed age hinds.

Unlike many who are targeting a compact breeding hind in the 120–125kg mature weight range, Duncan Humm said they favour

Table 1: Key Breeding Values for two stags used in Carluke Deer trial.

Sire	Weaning Weight (WWT) (kg)	Autumn Weight (AWT) (kg)	Weight at 12 months (W12) (kg)	Eye Muscle Area (EMA) (cm <sup>2</sup> )
8019.MFCF-16-247/16	+13.41	+15.146	+20.57	+0.805
8019.MFCF-16-265/16	+19.72	+23.586	+33.87	-0.004

a larger hind, more in the 130–140kg range. “In our environment, big hinds grow big fawns and if it does get dry during lactation, the larger hinds are better able to keep feeding their fawns. I used to cull the really big hinds – what was I thinking!”



Duncan Humm: Keen to see how the contrasting BVs for the two sires are expressed in their progeny in a commercial venison situation.

He is also interested in temperament and conformation – mainly well-muscled hindquarters. Humm usually retains between 20–30 yearling hinds each year as replacements. “If they can make 100kg by January then they're eligible to stay,” he says. Hinds that fail to raise a fawn are also likely to be culled.

The Humms are well aware that it's not wise to focus too much on one particular trait, and that health and nutrition are vital cogs in the deer growth machine, as are traits such as eye muscle area. On the feeding side they have a regular programme of pasture

renewal linked to their crops of swedes, kale and fodder beet. Humm says they won't persevere with fodder beet but in pursuit of a more regenerative approach are looking to establish mixed swards including species such as oats, triticale, vetch, lupins, kale and rape. In addition to the regularly renewed pastures (the 'oldest' has been in the ground only six years), Humm says there are some very old pastures. Some are up to 100 years old but still produce well.

Looking at the upcoming trial with the next crop of fawns, Humm is looking forward to seeing how the progeny from the two stags perform.

## Fearnvale Farm

**John and Tash Hamilton** run 750 elk/wapiti and 1,300 sheep on their 280 hectares (180 ha deer fenced) of rolling country near Winton in Southland.

John Hamilton says they have just started taking a closer look at BVs and they purchase their sires, so the breeding value proof trial was an ideal opportunity to gauge just what impact they could make on their venison production.



Some of the wapiti cows being used in the BV trial on the Hamiltons' Fearnvale farm, tucking into swedes on a break.

They are members of the Elk/Wapiti Southland Advance Party and in the early days of the group they highlighted a desire to grow more meat and velvet per hectare and improve reproductive performance. One strategy they trialled with some success was to hold groups of animals back from slaughter for 20 or 40 days to balance the costs (additional feed, falling schedule) against the benefits (increased carcass weight, more spiker velvet). On balance, the exercise showed a good net benefit, giving the Hamiltons more options when seasonal and market conditions allow.

One objective they highlighted earlier was greater use of BVs recorded on Deer Select, so John was happy to help out with the BV

Table 2: Key Breeding Values for two bulls used in Fearnvale Farm trial.

Sire	Weaning Weight (WWT) (kg)	Autumn Weight (AWT) (kg)	Weight at 12 months (W12) (kg)	Eye Muscle Area (EMA) (cm <sup>2</sup> )
8314.944/09	+4.755	+6.609	+5.879	+0.336
8314.404/14	+10.532	+13.876	+18.416	+0.623

proof trial when the opportunity arose.

They bought two wapiti bulls from Tikana. As with the sires used by the Humms, the BVs for growth for the two sires steadily widen with time from weaning weight (5.8kg apart) through to weight at 12 months, where there is a 12.5kg difference (Table 2). The superior sire also has a slight advantage on the eye muscle area BV.

Hamilton says the sires each mated groups of 40 mixed age cows of average weight with excellent results – only one dry cow out of the two groups.

"It wasn't any hassle setting up the trial. I'm interested to see how these BVs work for us and it might also give us a push to get some genetic improvement in our herd."

He says set stocking happens in late October, with calving under way by early November.

- As the progeny from the three on-farm breeding value proof trials grow, *Deer Industry News* will carry updates on how they are progressing and, in particular, how their progress measures up against the BVs of their sires. ■

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FARMERS' PRODUCE

# Where we've been, where we're going

The seven-year Passion2Profit (P2P) programme – a joint investment by DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries – now has less than three years to run and has been making a big impact on the growing and marketing of venison since it got underway. P2P Manager (and now DINZ CE) **Innes Moffat** reflects on the progress that's been made and priorities for the remainder of the programme, and beyond.

**P2P SET OUT** to create transformational change in the production and marketing of New Zealand farm-raised venison. The programme was started with the intention of improving farmers' ability to improve production efficiency and meet markets' requirements, and to create opportunities for marketing companies to work together to position New Zealand venison in new market segments that will increase returns to New Zealand.

The programme has improved deer farming efficiency and performance. It has introduced a national QA scheme that allows marketing companies to provide better market-led feedback to producers.

The national deer herd is increasing, but this turnaround took longer than originally modelled, so the potential returns for the industry will be lower than originally calculated. Other changes have been:

- Increased focus on good environmental management.
- Increased demand in existing markets has reduced marketing companies' ability to collaborate in non-traditional markets.
- Strong prices for deer velvet have reduced the focus on venison production to some extent.
- Better feeding of deer has improved production and deer health, although adoption of the agreed health review process among veterinarians has been less than hoped for. A review of DINZ's deer health strategy will provide recommendations for aligning research outcomes with farmers' needs.

## Priorities for the final 2½ years

1. Embed changes in farmer skill and confidence so they continue to improve performance and increase efficiency. This means continuing to support uptake of improved management practices through P2P practice change activities.
2. Enliven the QA programme to ensure it provides value to producers and their customers. This means adding market-led requirements, only where they will provide an advantage to New Zealand and helping with the adoption of standards as demanded.
3. Encourage and support farmers' adoption of improved environmental stewardship to ensure they meet their own, society's and their markets' expectations.
4. Cement in place the gains from collaborative market development activities, building on the investment already made in new and emerging markets. This means supporting non-seasonal marketing initiatives underway in Benelux, Germany and China and supporting new retail initiatives.
5. Prepare producer services to continue to add value to the industry post PGP funding. This means preparing business cases for ongoing support for Advance Parties, collaborative market activity and other services valued by the deer industry.

## Deer Industry Innovation Workshop 2019

A group of 34 young deer farmers met in Christchurch in late August at a workshop to consider what issues are going to affect their businesses in the next 10 years.

**DINZ HAD ASKED** business consultants from KPMG to prepare a programme that would encourage young farmers to think about how they manage their businesses and how they set their personal and business goals.

The aim of the workshop was to give attendees more skills to manage their businesses, create improved connections between deer farmers and agree on what needs to be done to ensure people keep enjoying farming deer.

After going through four sets of reading over the previous month, and sharing their business priorities and how they worked through an on-line comments forum, the participants gathered at

the Merino ZQ meeting space in Christchurch.

Their reading "homework" concentrated on four themes, which directed the content of the workshop:

1. Business decision making
2. Business and personal values
3. What motivates consumers
4. The operations of running your business

Two national business leaders spoke about how they operate their businesses in the international marketplace.

- Wayne Mulligan, CEO Fomana Capital, spoke about the range of opportunities open to New Zealand agribusiness in the personal

health sector, and the importance of linking business systems in order to focus on end consumers.

- Andy Borland, CEO, Scales Corp, spoke about his approach to leadership and how he empowers his team to take ownership of their decisions.

The group also heard from Simon Hunter, KPMG, who spoke about agriculture’s essential role in delivering employment and nutrition to a rapidly growing world population. Hunter also stressed that agriculture must, and will, solve the challenges of resource misallocation that threaten the global balance.

Attendees also heard from chefs Cat Scott-Hewitt and Graham Brown, who talked about the pressures facing restaurants around the world and how deer products might fit into changing diets. A dinner that featured an array of grown, foraged, pickled and raw vegetables, meat and offal kept everyone entertained.

Day two kicked off with sessions on shaping personal values and how these are often shared with neighbours and communities. It was agreed that finding the most common personal values can give a group or an organisation a common purpose and shared vision.

Attendees then worked in groups to discuss what characteristics and behaviours future consumers might have and what that meant for producing deer products. They talked about how food can become a solution to

some of the global problems we are facing and how consumers are expressing choices for sustainable products. They also discussed how products that contribute to “wellness” will become increasingly important as part of functional diet.

The attendees then looked at a change they wanted to make, drilling down to the “why”. What did they really want to change, and what would they do to make it happen?

The final session got the groups to look at what they could do together to make changes to their businesses. Suggestions focused on engaging with consumers and community to highlight the positive land management practised by farmers with deer.

- The Deer Industry Innovation Workshop 2019 was hosted by DINZ with funding assistance from the Ministry for Primary Industries PGP and from AgMardt. ■



Participants at the Deer Industry Innovation Workshop.



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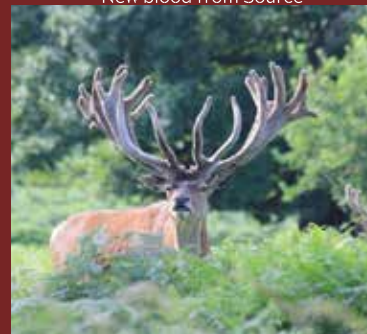
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# Cervena® part of the show at Cologne Fine Food Days

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Summer Cervena was part of a brand new German gourmet foodie festival – the Cologne Fine Food Days, also known as the Genuss-Festival.



Well-known German TV talk-show host Bettina Böttinger (centre) was one of the visitors to the stand learning about Cervena and its production and transport from Daniel Jamroz (left) and Shannon Campbell (right).

**THE COLOGNE REGION'S** top chefs – including several with Michelin stars – and leading regional winegrowers appeared in high-end culinary locations across the 38 events in the nine-day programme, which ran from 31 August to 8 September.

Silver Fern Farms was one of the festival sponsors, working alongside a key German distributor HP Klughardt and Deer Industry New Zealand in the Passion2Profit programme to raise awareness of Cervena as a summer menu option to German chefs.

Cervena was centre-stage at the opening kitchen party on 31 August at Club Volta, where all participating chefs and winemakers offered their creations and products on their own stands. Armed with a glass of wine, the chef, celebrity and gourmet foodie visitors browsed the stands, sampled the food and got their own top tips from the chefs and winemakers.

The Cervena stand was right at the entrance and at a junction where people passed by often.

“It attracted a lot of attention,” says a delighted Daniel Jamroz of Honeymilk Media who organised the activity on behalf of Silver Fern Farms.

“The opening night was super successful for us and just the right setting for the brand,” he reports. “The meat was extremely well received, both by the guests and by the other chefs.”

It was also an opportunity to educate the media who attended the event. DINZ’s Berlin-based chef Shannon Campbell, who was brought in to delight the visitors with tender Cervena tasting



dishes, found himself the subject of several interviews – snippets of which have since appeared on social media.

He cooked and presented two dishes highlighting the striploin and leg cuts – venison-tataki with passionfruit, yuzu ponzu sauce and tapioca chip and venison mini-steak with parsnip purée, chervil oil, blackcurrant gastrique and pickled plums. While doing so, he had the chance to educate the 400 plus guests about Cervena’s origin and quality, which he says meets the demands of many chefs, hobby chefs and gourmets for new, exclusive taste experiences.

Events in the full programme included five- and six-course dinners matched with wines at high-end restaurants like Ox & Klee, the Excelsior Hotel Ernst and the Hyatt Regency and the main event, a Gastro Party with street food.

Genuss-Festival is planned to take place annually to raise nationwide awareness of Cologne’s culinary potential, the event organisers say. Based on the success of this year’s programme, Silver Fern Farms says it will be there in 2020 to keep the Cervena venison flag flying. ■



Campbell telling one of the Fine Food Days visitors about Cervena’s attributes.

# Venison market update

In September, DINZ promotional work stepped up a gear with activities in Germany, Belgium, Netherlands and Scandinavia underway. The focus is on chef education; as always, new young chefs entering the industry need to be exposed to New Zealand venison.

**CHEF WORKSHOPS AND** training are run in conjunction with distribution companies. This augments the work that importing and distribution companies do to promote the availability of New Zealand venison through their traditional advertising activities.

- For venison, the United States continues to show steady growth for ground venison and for foodservice sales. The US restaurant trade is the biggest market for New Zealand venison and is continuing to experience buoyant growth.
- New Zealand marketing companies are continuing to work with importing and distribution partners to increase demand for New Zealand venison in new and diverse markets such as China, Canada and the Middle East. While volumes to these markets are not large, they expose new customers to New Zealand farm-raised venison to provide scope for future growth.
- In Europe the high prices and disappointing demand in 2018 meant some stocks have been carried through. Retail sales of frozen venison cuts were subdued, and further processors have hedged their bets on forward orders this year. Prices for frozen cuts have been adjusted down, which has contributed to the lower schedules this year. With cooler weather forecast for October, importers are expecting a better start to the game season this year.
- Chilled demand for New Zealand venison continues to be strong for retail and food service sales in continental Europe.
- The European summer programme ended in August. A new retail programme went well with good sales of chilled Cervena® leg steaks. However companies were a little disappointed with sales volumes. The programme for 2020 will need to seek a bigger impact considering the investment the industry has made to date.
- The US pet food premium is gone. The speculative demand that drove prices to record highs in 2018 has subsided as co-product prices return to more normal levels. While the bitcoin-like frenzy over venison meat and bone meal might not return, the long-term prospects for exotic

meats in animal food remain solid and can continue to support the current high venison prices.

The published schedule in the week beginning 29 September was \$9.54.

The average schedule for September was \$9.32, 18% down on the record achieved in 2018 but just 3% down on the average for September in 2017 and well above September averages for the previous three years (see Figure 1, month averages). ■



Graham Brown and Shannon Campbell hard at work on summer venison promotion in Germany with Chefs Culinar, a German foodservice distribution company.

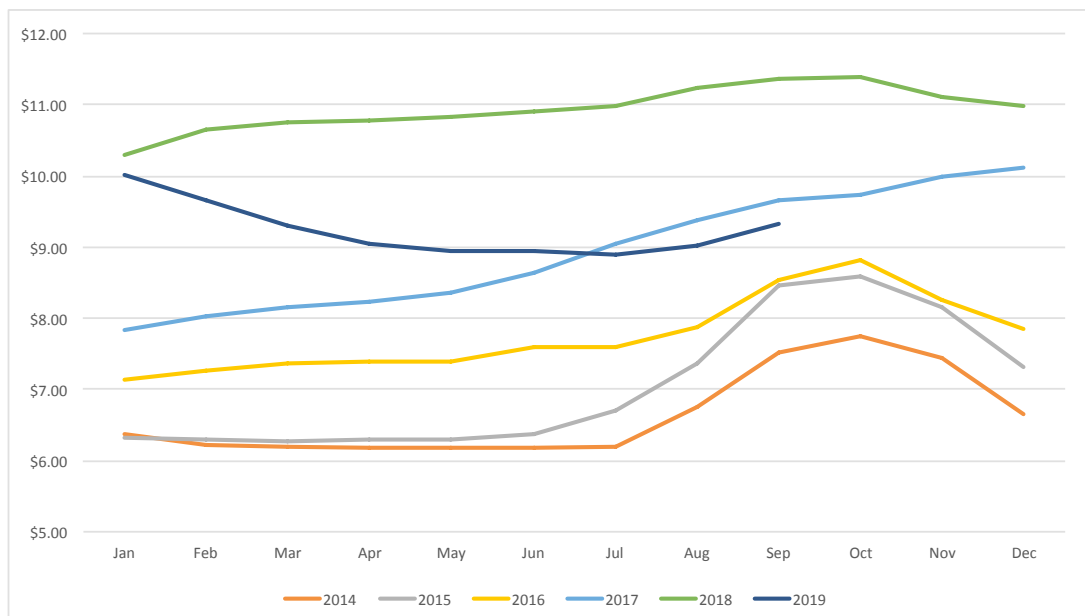


Figure 1: National published schedule: 2014–2019 (monthly averages).

# Wapiti/elk genetics key for Smart's early clearance

By the time you read this, every weaner on Don Smart's mid-Canterbury farm will have been finished and sent for processing.

**IT'S A STRATEGY** he's developed to ensure hind condition isn't compromised coming into fawning on what is a compact farm of just 96 hectares near Ashburton, carrying 480 breeding hinds.

"I'm pretty well stocked up," he admitted to an Elk & Wapiti Society field day on the property in August.

The society was there because using elk genetics is another key ingredient in that early finishing strategy. Smart buys replacement hybrid hinds from Chris Carran of Lochinvar Wapiti, Te Anau, and elk bulls to put across them from local breeder Murray Cook.

"I'm targeting a 60kg carcass by 1 October and 70kg is nearly achievable if I get it right," he said.

"The idea is to get rid of everything early because this is only a small place and if I keep them longer it will certainly have an impact on the hinds."

Hinds are wintered in two mobs on beet with grass baleage. Those mobs are split in mid-October as the hinds are set stocked around the mostly 4–5ha paddocks at 10/ha.

"That might be a little high but we only lose one or two per cent at fawning."

It's another reason why he favours hybrid hinds. With space per hind for fawning a limiting factor, running bigger hinds, put to elk bulls, means he finishes more kilograms of venison per fawning site. Buying replacement hinds, rather than breeding his own, helps keep size in check and keeps things simple, he adds.

The hinds stay in their fawning mobs and paddocks through to weaning in late February or early March, with irrigation from a 130m-deep bore and rotor-rainers ensuring the grass keeps growing. Barley and baleage is offered from January onward if necessary.

The barley is homegrown, a couple of paddocks being sown each spring, following fodder beet. Having had two years out of grass, paddocks go back into pasture after the barley. Meanwhile, what were the worst-performing couple of grass paddocks the previous summer are earmarked for the following spring's fodder beet, and used to winter weaners with ad-lib barley and baleage.

His current preferred seed mix for regrassing is Abergrass or Trojan with NEA2 endophyte plus chicory, plantain, and red and white clovers.

"It's high-quality pasture. After the second year we'll stitch in another half-rate of grass and treat it with suSCon Green [for grass grub] to keep it going," he told the field day.



Plantain, chicory and clovers help maintain pasture quality throughout summer.

By the time the suSCon Green protection runs out, typically four years later, it's time to go back into beet and so on.

Hinds are mated in mobs of 80–90 with bulls swapped out just before mid-April. Scanning percentage is typically around the 95–96 percent mark.

Weaning percentage has been 90 percent in the past but for the last two years that's slipped to 80–85 percent. Exactly why, Smart's still trying to find out. Leptospirosis vaccination made no difference, so now he's looking at mineral deficiencies as a possible cause, though he acknowledged parasites "might be a factor" too when asked at the field day.

Salt, copper and trace element mix LQ4 from ZinPro were used this winter, spread on baleage, to try to compensate for any deficiencies. Previously he'd tried using copper bullets but too many were regurgitated in the yards.

Besides trace elements, animal health for weaners starts with dual active oral drench Scanda (levamisole + oxfendazole) when



Breeder/finisher, Don Smart.

## Farm detail

- 96 hectares fully irrigated near Ashburton
- 480 hybrid hinds put to elk bulls
- All weaners finished and gone in October
- Hinds wintered on beet and baleage
- Weaners wintered on grass with ad-lib barley and baleage



they're tagged in early February and again at weaning in late February–early March, followed by a Cydectin injection 10 days later. Primer and booster vaccinations for *Yersinia* and clostridial diseases follow, and a triple-active drench delivered orally by mixing Exodus (moxidectin) with Oxfen C Plus (oxfendazole + levamisole). A final Cydectin injection in May completes the programme.

“Any later than that and we can run into trouble with meat withholding periods,” he pointed out, reflecting on the early kill strategy.

Hinds get a Cydectin injection in September.

Historically, he'd take his first draft of weaners around mid-September but last year and this, on the advice of his Advance Party group, he's delayed that first cut. This year everything was due to go on contracts to Mountain River and Silver Fern Farms in the weeks commencing October 14th and 21st.

Smart said long-term his weaners have put on an average of 13kg liveweight from 1 June to 1 August, and this year were “just a bit above” with a range 10–16kg.

At 213g/day, that comfortably exceeded even the high growth on specialist forages line on the P2P seasonal average growth rate charts, it was noted in the ensuing discussion. What's more, Smart's results were from more or less 50/50 mixed-sex mobs whereas he felt the P2P data could be skewed towards stags.

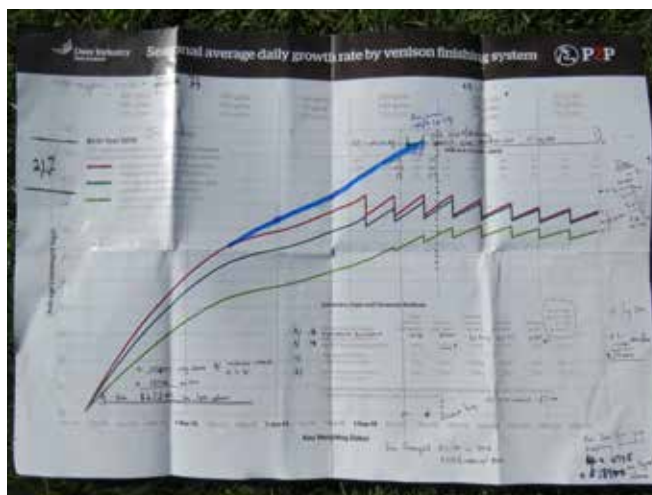
“If you include the hinds, those P2P figures decrease considerably but with wapiti-cross there's a lot less difference between the sexes, 4kg to 5kg at most,” commented Smart's elk bull supplier, Murray Cook, who showed an annotated copy of the P2P venison finishing system growth rate chart (see photo and Table 1).

**Table 1: Elk & Wapiti Society estimate of advantage of high-growth elk/wapiti system compared with high or medium-growth genetics returns as documented on P2P venison growth chart.**

System	Min draft weight	Ave draft date	Ave carcass weight	Ave price/kg	\$/head**
High-growth elk/wap*	116kg	25 Oct	64.8kg	\$10.33	\$669 (+\$71)
P2P high-growth genetics on specialist forages	95kg	6 Oct	57.8kg	\$10.33	\$598
P2P high-growth genetics on grass-plus	95kg	8 Nov	56.8kg	\$10.26	\$583 (-\$15)
P2P moderate-growth genetics on all grass	90kg	18 Jan	51.8kg	\$9.93	\$515 (-\$84)

\*Figures provided by Elk & Wapiti Society

\*\* Difference from P2P figures for high-growth genetics on specialist forages in brackets.



The P2P venison finishing system chart based on Deer Progeny Test figures and modified based on local experience for elk/wapiti, was a talking point at the field day.

For finishers, that could make the difference between getting all carcasses into the optimum weight range, or not, he pointed out.

“The important thing, to get the big money, is you've got to hit the target weights,” he stressed.

Smart noted that if the P2P calculations were corrected to the same kill date, the advantage of elk/wapiti on a grass-plus system such as his would be even higher (see table).

“You've got about \$75 here, but if you kill them on the same day it's more like \$150.”

Rob Millar from Mountain River Venison noted much of their early kill was wapiti-cross and probably had the potential to be taken “a lot bigger” if growers chose to hang on to them.

“Admittedly there are a few reds in early October but they are only the really high-end genetics whereas the wapiti-cross we get are middle of the road.”

Hybrid weaners were also generally a much easier sell in autumn for those not finishing their deer, he added.

Alliance's Bede Crean, who covers the top of the South Island deer business for the co-operative and has a 500-hind hybrid herd himself, echoed Millar's comments. He suggested innovations in carcass yield analysis could give wapiti-cross genetics a further advantage in future.

“The carcass of a wapiti and a red are subtly different ... I reckon if you draft wapiti-cross and reds of the same weight, on the same day, you'd probably get 2 percent more meat yield from the waps.”

Cook suggested breeders and finishers look to the Deer Industry Manual to remind themselves of the benefits of using elk or wapiti bulls. Even though it's approaching 20 years old, it “still has a lot of relevant information,” he stressed.

## Smart shower system

Faced with the risk of price reductions due to dirty deer, Don Smart rigged up a simple, low-cost shower system in his shed in 2018. A 60-litre/minute pump draws water from a 1000-litre tank to feed a grid of standard galvanised pipes on the floor of a pen in his shed (see photo next page).

*continued on page 34*

*Wapiti/elk: continued*

“I didn’t want anything to go below B grade and this was a cheap way to safeguard against that,” he told the Elk & Wapiti Society field day.



Simple DIY solution to dirty deer.

The pipes have 2mm holes drilled in their topside roughly every 450mm and the resulting jets of water reach a couple of metres high if not obstructed. He puts mobs of 20–30 weaners in the pen at a time and it takes 10–15 minutes for them to move around enough to come clean all over.

“When there’s a bit of a gap the jets go up over their backs and it gets the dirt on top as well,” he explained. All up (excluding his time) the system cost him less than \$500 to install.

### Contrasting supply system

From Don Smart’s property, the Elk & Wapiti Society field day moved inland to the top of the Canterbury Plain to see NZ Bison’s deer finishing farm at Alford Forest. In the first week of March 1,100 wapiti-cross weaners come in from their high country breeding property, Mt Possession, for finishing. This year’s mob averaged 63kg liveweight on arrival and by the time the first of them go on contract to Mountain River starting late October, they’ll be 75kg carcass weight.

“We run them in the mobs they come down in initially, then take the bottom end off after about two months,” Glen Whyte explained.

They’re wintered on fodder beet and precision-sown swedes, swapping crops half-way through winter to maintain intakes and growth rates, which do a mixed-sex average of about 180g/day on beet and 210–220g/day on swedes. Whyte reckons 90 days on beet “is the absolute maximum” before weaners simply stop eating it.

No barley is offered while on winter crops, but feeders are sometimes put out once they’re back on grass if the season’s grass growth is slow. Once back on grass, with lengthening days growth rates surge to 350–470g/day.

Mobs are managed to spread delivery throughout the summer with the last going in early May. Later-delivered male weaners are cut twice for velvet, and some three times. “By holding them longer we get about half a kilogram of velvet per spiker at least.”

Across the season last year’s average kill weight was 75.37kg.

Resurfacing yards a couple of years ago with a basalt chip base, topped with chipped lime, has proven a success, eliminating foot

problems, dust, and flightiness.

“They seem a lot more settled on this surface, probably because it’s not moving under their feet,” noted Whyte. It also “freezes dry” so isn’t slippery on frosty mornings. ■



Glen Whyte discusses yard surfaces with the Elk & Wapiti Society field day.

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# Little science behind proposed changes

by Mark McCoard, NZDFA Executive Committee

This year has seen farmers swamped by legislation tabled by the coalition government. It started with the now-shelved Capital Gains Tax, closely followed by the Carbon Zero Bill, a proposal to admit agriculture into the Emissions Trading Scheme, the current Essential Freshwater Proposals and finally the yet-to-be-released guidelines for winter grazing by the newly assembled Winter Grazing Task Force.

**GIVEN THE LIST** of issues encased in this evolving legislation, it is no wonder livestock farming feels under attack. Many changes were initiated with good intentions, but the common theme has been very little scientific and economic modelling to back these up. Because of the importance of agriculture to the New Zealand economy, it is an eye opener how little the big-picture impacts and direct consequences have been considered. With the strong international demand for our high-quality products, it would appear one of the biggest economic risks we face as a country is changes to our own legislation that impact ourselves.

Many New Zealand farmers are playing their part in reducing the impact they have environmentally but there is much more to be done. The early movers have made significant progress. This can be seen in the amount of waterway fencing, riparian and erosion control planting that has been undertaken, along with all the other management improvements such as better technology and mapping for planning fertiliser applications and new grazing management techniques driven by the need to cut nutrient losses and protect soil and water. Due to the significant changes farming has made, water quality is improving in many catchments, a reality that, sadly, rarely rates a mention.

The formation of numerous catchment groups nationally is yet another example of farmers taking a proactive role in ensuring that impacts are monitored and necessary improvements undertaken. This collective approach, guided by local knowledge and water quality data and backed by sound science, is something all farmers should support and consider being involved in. This should be the basis of effective change rather than confusing and impractical legislation that is unnecessarily restrictive and expensive.

The deer industry has been for many years, and continues to be, a leader in the implementation and adoption of environmental best practice and animal welfare. This should position us well, unless we face the blunt, generalised regulation across all land use types and livestock species that has been suggested. With that in mind, it is vitally important we look to ensure our proactive history is acknowledged and taken into account by regulators. In this area we are very well represented by Lindsay Fung and the DINZ team, supported by the national structure of the NZDFA. There has been a huge amount of work undertaken behind the scenes, but it needs the weight of farmer support behind it.

While both DINZ and NZDFA will be making submissions on behalf of the deer industry, it is also critical that as many farmers

and supporting industries as possible also make submissions. There will no doubt be plenty of submissions from environmental and other organisations that do not support farming, so our concerns need to be heard loud and clear because once the submission process closes the next form we will view it will be in the way of legislation.

This time of year is hectic for many, but I would urge all farmers and supporting industries to take the time to make a submission as the content of this legislation is likely to affect farming for generations to come.

Submissions close on **31 October** so there is very little time to act if you haven't already done so. To make an online submission on *Action for healthy waterways: A discussion document on national direction for our essential freshwater* go to:

- [mfe.govt.nz/consultation/action-for-healthy-waterways](https://mfe.govt.nz/consultation/action-for-healthy-waterways)
- This article was also published in the NZDFA newsletter, *Stagline-Online* ■



Many early movers have already made significant progress on their own properties.

# Trees for shade and shelter

by Janet Gregory, NZ Landcare Trust

A field day at Martin and Maree Bush's property at Carew in Mid Canterbury on 17 September gave excellent insights into the opportunities for planting options during a change from border dyke to centre pivot irrigation.

**THE DAY WAS** supported by the Canterbury West Coast DFA's Environmental Interest Group.

Deer farmers were provided with a map of the property outlining the range of species that had been planted in the different shelterbelts by Martin and Maree, and Martin's father Ron before him.

Ron explained that a big storm in 1945 took out shelterbelts across Canterbury. He was determined to replant and established mixed shelterbelts of radiata pine, Arizona cypress and Douglas fir. With assistance from the catchment board, many shelterbelts were planted over the years, with a wide variety of species. Deciduous trees, mainly Tasman and Lombardy poplar, were included in the mix with some of these woven into the shelterbelts so they filtered the wind and allowed some sunlight in winter.



Martin Bush (right) outlines the benefits to deer farmers of different shelter species and how they have been managed at the trees for shade and shelter field day.

Martin and Maree took over running the property in the 1990s and bought Rakaia red hinds building up to 400 hinds at their peak along with sheep and beef. The operation has changed over time as they realised they could grow a lot of grass and are now surrounded by dairy farming so dairy support is in the mix with wintering 750 cows. They still have 300 ewes and buy in store lambs but have reduced the hind herd to 70. A wapiti terminal sire is used and all progeny finished on the farm. The Bushes also lease 26 hectares for barley.

Martin and Maree have continued the planting started by Ron and their love of trees is evident with a range of amenity trees providing shade and shelter around the house, yards and even placed strategically to make yarding the deer easier.

The farm operation has been changing, with a move from border dyke to centre pivot irrigation. This has meant many of the existing shelterbelts are having to go, so they are starting to plant shelterbelts of native trees around the outside of the pivot area as well as along internal fence lines.

Devin Westley from Southern Wood Nursery at Rolleston was on hand to offer advice to the farmers on what species were suitable to handle the regular watering, the height they will grow to, and preparation and maintenance for planting.



A well-prepared area under pivot that is ripped, sprayed, fenced and ready for planting.



Devin Westley outlines how the new biodegradable coconut husk plant protectors can be used, watched by Tracey McLean.

## Key points from the discussion

- Planning and preparation is key. Talk to your nursery 6 to 18 months ahead of time for growing some species because there is huge interest and demand for native trees now.
- Rip the soil preferably before fencing, so that roots can get established freely.
- Spray out the area with glyphosate twice before planting.
- Allow for three or four rows, planting in a zig-zag on the rows and mixing the species.
- Allow for tree protectors at planting to aid establishment and protect against wind and pests, and protect during releasing.
- Spraying trees with the egg-based mix (marketed as Liquid Shotgun) before planting will help protect against pests. The rotting egg smell repels rabbits, hares and possums but if there are large animal numbers, pest control is also required before planting, with regular follow-up.
- If planting under pivots, avoid planting anything that will grow tall such as *Pittosporum* spp. or *Hoheria*.
- The lower-growing *Phormium cookianum* is more suitable than *Phormium tenax*.
- Don't put flax or toetoe on outside rows as they will put pressure on hot wires.
- Wattles can be good near yards because they are thirsty trees and so help to keep an area dry. They are also good for bees.
- Maintenance of trees in the first two years is important to give them the best start.
- Release spray once weeds start to appear.
- Don't plant too much in the first year, only what you can maintain. Monitor plantings to see what does well on your property.

- Aim for locally sourced trees, as they will grow better in your local conditions. Ask your nursery if they can contract grow specific trees and seed sources.
- Plant in spring or autumn, but poplar and willow poles need to be planted in the middle of winter when trees are dormant.
- Four electric wire fences are suitable for within-pivot areas.
- If possible, use high tower pivots which give a 3m clearance. They have a wider wheel base and are supposed to be more stable in the wind.
- In winter, deer look for areas that are filtered for the wind and in summer they look for shade.



Mixed native plantings alongside road on a neighbouring property provide great screening and can be grown outside pivots.

continued on page 38

# Obituary: Donald (Don) Robert Jerrard Stephenson

21 April 1934 – 16 August 2019

**THE DEER INDUSTRY** mourns the recent passing of Don Stephenson. Don was a long-time deer farmer with a smallholding on the outskirts of Waipawa and a deer transport operator throughout Hawke's Bay and the Central North Island.

He was an enthusiastic member in the early days of the DeerQA Transport Committee set up by the Game Industry Board, helping develop and review the DeerQA standards for transport.

Don started his specialist operation, D&J Stephenson Ltd, with his wife Joy in 1985. He took immense pride in his role as a specialist deer transporter right through until 2006 when he handed over the business to his son Robert, who still operates as a specialist deer transporter today.

He had been involved with transport all his life, having bought into Stephenson's Transport in Waipawa with his brothers in 1964.

Don had a reputation for being hard but fair during his transporting years and his wealth of knowledge of deer and deer

transport enabled him to help many deer farmers and deer farm workers with the right methods to improve things.

The deer industry extends its condolences to Don's family.

Rest in Peace  
Don ■



Shade and shelter: continued

### Species suitable for planting under pivots

- *Austroderia richardii* South Island toetoe
- *Coprosma propinqua* Mingimingi
- *Coprosma Roys Red*
- *Coprosma rugosa* Needle-leaved mountain coprosma
- *Corokia cotoneaster* Korokio
- *Corokia Yellow Wonder or Red Wonder*
- *Hebe salicifolia* Koromiko
- *Leptospermum scoparium* Manuka
- *Muehlenbeckia astonii* Shrubby tororaro
- *Phormium cookianum* Mountain flax
- *Plagianthus divaricatus* Swamp ribbonwood

### Native species that can be planted outside pivots

- *Cordyline australis* Cabbage tree
- *Griselinia littoralis* Broadleaf
- *Hoheria angustifolia* Narrow leaved lacebark
- *Kunzea ericoides* Kanuka
- *Pittosporum tenuifolium* Kohuhu
- *Plagianthus regius* Ribbonwood
- *Sophora microphylla* South Island Kowhai

## STOP PRESS

### Moffat to lead DINZ Executive team

**Innes Moffat** has been named as the new Chief Executive for Deer Industry New Zealand. Innes is well known to the deer industry, having joined DINZ in 2005 as Venison Marketing Services Manager. That appointment followed time with the former Meat and Wool New Zealand, including a four-year stint in Brussels as Market Manager Continental Europe.

In more recent years, Innes has been DINZ's P2P Manager, leading the seven-year Primary Growth Partnership between the deer industry and the Ministry for Primary Industries' Sustainable Farming Fund.

DINZ chair Ian Walker says the DINZ board ran an external recruitment process that attracted some very strong candidates from both inside and outside the industry. After considering all applicants the board made the unanimous decision that Innes was the best candidate for the job.

The news of Innes' appointment came through just as we were going to press and we'll be carrying a more in-depth profile in our next issue. ■



### Janet moves on from NZ Landcare Trust

After 16 years working with farmers throughout New Zealand on improving their farm environments – and 13 of those years working with the deer industry – Janet Gregory has moved on to a new role with the Ministry for Primary Industries as Extension Services Lead, South Island, starting on 14 October. The job involves managing the implementation and delivery of farmer-led extension services in the regions to support the move to higher-value products, sustainable practices and improved producer wellbeing.

She has been a tireless attendee at, and contributor to, countless deer industry events around the country, large and small, and a strong advocate for farmers putting environmental considerations front and centre of their business planning.

A major initiative for the deer industry was a three-year Sustainable Farming Fund programme to help increase uptake of environmental best practice as laid out in the 2012 Deer Farmers' Landcare Manual.

In 2017 she received the inaugural Kaitiaki Tohu Pai award, at the Southland Community Environment Awards in recognition of her work in biodiversity.

She was also a significant contributor to the 2018 Environmental Management Code of Practice, an initiative that has helped position deer farmers well to tackle the current challenges on emissions and water quality that face all livestock pastoral industries.

Janet says she has really enjoyed working with the deer industry, valuing the friendships she's made and the support she's received in her role with NZ Landcare Trust.

"It has been great to see the progress that has been managed, not only in the discussions around environmental best/good practice but also to see how farmers have grasped and implemented the changes on their farms.

"I have really appreciated the way farmers have welcomed me onto their properties and shared their aspirations and how they manage their farms."

She says that while farmers are currently facing a lot of uncertainty, there are also opportunities and she hopes to keep making a difference from the ground up. "Hopefully I will still be working with you at some level but in a different way and for a different organisation."

NZDFA Chair John Somerville said Janet's contribution to the deer industry on the environmental front has been huge and she will be sorely missed. "We have all greatly benefited from Janet's commonsense approach backed by strong environmental knowledge."

Former DFA Chair and now DINZ Board member Kris Orange said deer farmers have come a long way on the environmental front over the past 10–15 years and a lot of that was down to Janet's knowledge and practical advice. ■



Janet Gregory speaking at a Raincliff Station field day.

# No easy answers in death of weaner mob

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Deaths among weaners making the transition from a breeding to a finishing property can and do occur, but losing an entire mob is extremely rare. Yet according to a diagnostic report in the Ministry for Primary Industries' publication, *Surveillance*, that is precisely what happened in a mob of 224 weaner stags in the southern South Island in March and April this year.

**ALL WERE LOST** and the cause is a bit of a head scratcher. In fact it's likely that there were several causes at play – multi-factorial in veterinary parlance.

The *Surveillance* report notes that the weaners appeared well when they arrived at the finishing property after a 4–5 hour truck journey. (Their average weight was 57kg.) They had been given a drench with Oxfen C and Oxfen C Plus, with a Cydectin injection, three days before they were moved – a mix that's widely used in the industry. They were not vaccinated for *Yersinia*, however.

## Changed feed

There was a change from pasture to a grain/silage mix about 10–14 days after they arrived. The weaners were initially reluctant to try the new feed, but eventually took to it well.

A few days later weaners started dying and within a week, most had died with only a small group of survivors in poor condition. Ruminal acidosis and *Salmonella* were ruled out and levels of copper and selenium were fine. The pathology lab did, however, see lesions from lungworms and concluded that the infestation and damage was heavy enough to have caused the deaths. The technical term was “verminous pneumonia”. Gribbles pathologist John Gill said he'd not seem a case like this in decades and speculated that the pasture the weaners were released onto at the finishing farm was carrying a very heavy burden of larvae.

Yet this case wasn't so cut and dried. A second, smaller mob of weaner stags had made the same journey from the same breeding farm a few days later and were put in an adjacent paddock to the

weaners that were dying in droves. They shared the same water course and trough supply. There were no unexplained deaths in this second mob. The only discernible difference was that the first mob were rested for 3 days between drenching and transport and the second mob had been rested for 6 days.

## Heavy parasite burden

The attending veterinarian, Donald Murray, told *Deer Industry News* that when he came to the property only a handful of the weaners from the affected mob survived. He did post mortems and found heavy burdens of both lungworm and gastrointestinal parasites. This led him to conclude that some animals at least had missed their drench.


He also isolated *Yersinia* and *Campylobacter* from the post mortems he carried out. Murray said it was hard to explain why several apparently undrenched animals had survived while their presumably drenched herdmates had already succumbed.

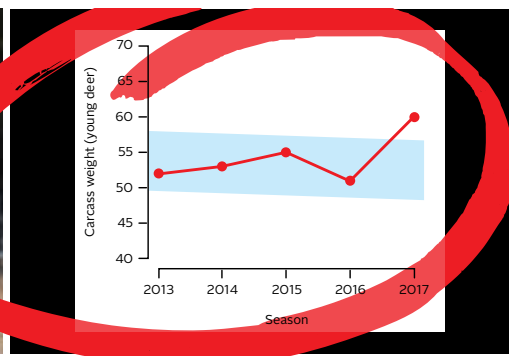
“My only conclusion is that the drench had some effect on their survivability, despite the fact that this drench regimen had been used successfully in the past.”

He believes that *Yersinia* probably also contributed significantly to the deaths and that *Campylobacter* could also be implicated.

“My only recommendation could be spelling the animals [following drenching] prior to shipping, and vaccinating against *Yersinia*.” ■

## Benchmarked production and Johne's disease info on your deer





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DPO717

# Tagine of venison

by Chef Graham Brown

Preparation: 30 mins

Time to cook: 1 hour

## Ingredients

1 kg diced venison from shoulder or leg  
2 Tbsp of vegetable oil  
Two large Tbsp Moroccan spice rub/Harrissa  
2 pinches saffron threads  
1/4 tspn turmeric  
2 large onions diced  
4 cloves crushed garlic  
1 can chopped, peeled tomatoes  
1/2 cup dried apricots  
1/2 cup blanched almonds  
1 small chopped chilli pepper  
1 Tbsp honey  
A little lemon zest or pickled lemon rind  
1 tspn mint  
1 tspn parsley  
2 cups meat stock  
Chopped coriander leaves for garnish

## Accompaniments

Tomato cucumber salad  
Thick yoghurt  
Dried apricots  
Fresh dates  
Grilled eggplant  
Cous cous with saffron threads.

## Method

- Rub spice mix into venison and heat the oil in the tagine
- Brown the meat all over
- Add onion and cook until clear
- Add all remaining ingredients except coriander leaves and cover with lid
- Turn down to a low heat and simmer 1 hour on the stove, checking and stirring from time to time
- When cooked, remove lid and allow to cook for a further 10 minutes. This allows some of the liquid to evaporate and thicken.
- Add coriander leaves just prior to serving with accompaniments. ■

