

Deer Industry News

Hawke's Bay
recovering



**Deer Industry
Conference**
FULL COVERAGE
OF FIRST-EVER
VIRTUAL DEER
CONFERENCE

Next Generation
VISITS TO SMEDLEY
STATION AND TEMCO
AGRICULTURE PLUS
WORKSHOP SESSIONS

Tech Webinar Series
VELVET, REPRODUCTION,
DEERPRO AND INDUSTRY
UPDATES IN ONLINE
PROGRAMME

Deer Industry News

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

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Cover: This photo by Grant Charteris, "Lineout", shows his farm in better times before this year's drought. Visitors to Grant and Sally's farm for a Hawke's Bay Originals AP Workshop on 10 July (see p16) saw the pastures are slowly recovering with careful management. Grant's photo won second prize in the 2020 MSD Animal Health Photo Awards.

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EDITOR Phil Stewart, Words & Pictures

LAYOUT Rory Stewart

Fiordland reflections

The Fiordland branch of NZDFA harks back to the earliest days of the deer industry, from the first venison recovery to live capture and then farming. Its territory is literally at the frontiers of the industry, but as deer farming has evolved numbers have dwindled and the branch can no longer sustain itself independently. It is winding up operations with remaining members joining the Southland NZDFA. Former Fiordland chair **Chris Hughes** reflects on the branch's heritage.



Marg and Chris Hughes.

DURING THE LATE 1970s, the deer farming industry was taking its first tentative steps towards what it is now. There was an undoubted enthusiasm as many people not traditionally involved in farming became involved.

Innovators started capturing red deer using numerous methods and supplying fledgling farmers with breeding stock. This was buoyed by the generous tax incentives offered by governments of the day.

Fiordland was a natural haven for this activity, due to its resource of deer in large numbers. Coupled with this advantage was the wish of the then National Parks Board to reduce deer numbers, then deemed a pest.

After a few years of attending meetings and field days in Southland and the Te Anau basin, a group of farmers in the Te Anau area decided that due to the geographical size of Southland and the many complex issues being faced by our new industry, it would make good sense to form a local NZDFA branch.

We had a nucleus of undoubted enthusiasm and tackled issues head on. At one point I believe our membership was close to 120. In the mid 1980s we got a severe reality check when Roger Douglas introduced a new livestock tax. This dropped the price of deer to product-related returns. In a short time we saw the price of hinds drop from around \$5,000 to less than \$1,000 per head.

During the 1980s we started a branch velvet sale, held in late November or early December. This was a very popular day, but became a logistical nightmare having to handle individual farmer lots. One year there was more than 12 tonnes.

It is sad that our branch is now ceasing activities, but with a large corporate operation dominating numbers in the area and failing to fully embrace branch activities, this result was inevitable. Deer farming is now less of a singular entity and more of an integrated system including other livestock classes.

Over the years we have been in the thick of numerous innovations and debates. People like Evan Meredith, Owen Buckingham, Russell McDonald, Chris Peterson, Jim Cameron, Murray Hagen and myself have been involved – who would expect anything less?

During our tenure the branch hosted two conferences and numerous other activities that I believe were all a resounding success. We now move on and return to operating as part of the Southland branch, with our modest monetary contribution that will be earmarked for research. ■

– Chris Hughes, former Fiordland DFA chair, Foundation Member NVSB, former member NZDFA SAP, Director Provelco Cooperative

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A virtual conference in 3 parts

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor and Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Attendees at the 2020 conference enjoyed the event from the comfort of home for the first time, thanks to the impact of Covid-19. While many would have missed the traditional networking and camaraderie, the online event made it easier for more people to check in and watch over the three days it was streamed: 30 June, 7 July and 14 July.

THE HOST WAS rural media personality Sarah Perriam, who encouraged viewers to interact through the online chat function, an invitation many accepted. Her company Perriam Media broadcast the conference sessions from the Lincoln University campus.



Rural media personality Sarah Perriam hosted the three-part conference broadcasts online.

Ian Walker: State of the nation

DINZ chair Ian Walker said many of the adjustments caused by lockdown will make permanent changes to the way we do business, but keeping connected was vital, whether in person or by video link. He noted we are in the middle of the biggest economic and social dislocation since WW2, with the consequences to be felt for years.

New Zealanders could be proud of the way they responded to the challenges, he said.

“The impact of the pandemic on the deer industry has been severe. All the restaurants in our main markets closed virtually overnight and food service companies had to cancel orders as they had no outlets.” Walker said he’s confident the worst of that uncertainty had passed, as commerce around the world starts to flow again.

While we might not like hearing what the venison companies’ price expectations



DINZ chair Ian Walker: Food producers highly regarded in NZ.

are, it was better to have some certainty. Having two separate income streams had helped the industry.

Walker reminded the industry not to drop the ball on standards of animal welfare or environmental management through this period. Covid-19 hadn’t changed the need to address domestic issues such as new water regulations, the imposition of costs to account for greenhouse gas emissions and the perceived rural-urban divide, “threatening our sense of place as responsible food producers and guardians of the land”.

“Food producers are held in high regard in New Zealand. The Government has listened to the rural sector’s concerns about the freshwater proposals and we now have a partnership approach to account for and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.”

He said DINZ had been helping deer farmers complete their Farm Environment Plans, understand and execute them. “We now understand the rules around freshwater and know what we have to do, but we’ll continue to challenge unnecessary bureaucracy if consenting is needed for everyday farming.”

Walker said we need to show where we are already complying with the rules, which will apply to most farms, and get on with it where changes are needed. The Deer Industry Environment Groups had been one of the most effective practice change initiatives DINZ had put in place.

Climate change was irrefutable and agriculture had to play its part in reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Walker said DINZ did not agree with the Government’s calculations and assessment of the role of methane in climate change, and was part of a sector group working with Government to arrive at a better assessment of the impact of changes in methane. The climate action partnership, He Waka Eke Noa (see more on p10), is working to build a framework by 2025 for reducing agricultural GHGs. If a GHG accounting system couldn’t be developed, agriculture would have to join the emissions trading scheme, Walker said. Large-scale afforestation of productive land was a real risk and deer farming along with other sectors had to be able to compete without being undermined.

The recent increase in average carcass weights showed that deer farming was responding to the challenge of increasing productivity through better genetics, feeding and health, Walker said.

The 2020 drought and feed shortages had tested the well-known resilience of deer farmers. Walker said DINZ and NZDFA had been working with farmers and meat companies to help ensure support was in place where farms needed to destock or find grazing.

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Conference: continued

“I implore you to be brave enough to have conversations with friends, neighbours and colleagues about stress and mental health.”

Courses run for young people in the industry by DINZ were hopefully helping prepare them to cope with pressures like these. He said we need to also look ahead to a post-Covid world, when demand for deer products would return.

Innes Moffat: Sticking with deer

Innes Moffat has attended many deer industry conferences but this was his first as **DINZ CEO**. He said in the 1980s when things were tough for agriculture he'd chosen not to follow in his forbears' footsteps and take on his family farm, but since then he's stayed close to the sector in other roles.

He said agriculture turned out not to be a sunset industry and indeed is important as never before. The deer industry with its history of innovation, flexibility and leadership was contributing to that. Those qualities helped attract him to the deer industry and DINZ. Just as farming had got through the upheavals of the 1980s, it would get through Covid, Moffat said. Focusing on the things that we can control was an important part of this. Looking through the lens of DINZ's four strategic objectives for the industry (see in bold text below), he said this meant controlling the story and integrity of our production systems.

For the velvet sector, DINZ was making a significant investment in the VelTrak tracing system to protect supply chain integrity from paddock to processor and underpin **premium positioning** of our products. This supported customers who were promoting the New Zealand origins of the velvet they used.

For venison, the importance of **market diversification**, was highlighted when Covid struck and key markets shut down. DINZ responded with three priorities:

- restoring confidence in access to China (this has been partially successful to date)
- helping marketers develop new channels (e.g. an Alliance customer has got Cervena® into a Belgian retailer in summer and First Light has developed new retail goods)
- ramp up support to the food service sector as restaurants reopened (material has been prepared for chefs in key markets such as China, the Netherlands and Germany).

“It's great to hear restaurants in Germany and Belgium are reopening and are booked up for a month.”

Moffat acknowledged that there was a lack of information to help guide the weaner market this year, and that the efforts by some companies to provide more certainty did not please everyone. However the information provided gave some direction and set a floor for pricing in the market, and a subsequent lift in the schedule.

For **sustainable on-farm value creation**, productivity is a



Innes Moffat: Farming survived 80s and will get through Covid.

key component, Moffat said. “It's been great to see the increased productivity you've achieved with venison and velvet.” He added that increased yields needed to be balanced with the costs of production.

One productivity tool being managed by DINZ is Deer Select. An independent review showed an 8 percent annual average increase in genetic merit in the programme's recorded herds. The gains had accelerated over the past 5 years as recording improved.

“We have some exciting and affordable new technology in the deer industry that will power up genetic improvement,” he said. The new eBV for CARLA (see page 5) was especially significant for the industry.

“The US restaurant trade is down but not out and will come back. Keep the faith – you produce a first-class product!”

Angus Cleland, Terra Pacific Marketing LP, checking in on the live conference stream from Napa, California.

Moffat said his predecessors stressed taking pride in the industry. Although confidence has taken a knock with Covid, the history and tenacity of deer farmers, the great reputation of their products and the advances coming through science are grounds for confidence. All of this would support the fourth objective – “that we are a **cohesive and respected industry**”.

Answering follow-up

questions, Moffat confirmed:

- DINZ was watching costs carefully in the current environment but would continue to invest in key markets.
- All companies are selling well into the New Zealand retail market for venison.
- DINZ and DFA were working closely with other sector groups to respond to new freshwater regulations (see report from Lindsay Fung on page 10).
- The increase in carcass weights is genuine and not a result of later killing dates. Weights have increased 3–4 percent a year over the past 5 years.

Tony Pearce: DINZ/NZDFA partnership working well

DINZ producer manager Tony Pearce, looked at the highlights of the working relationship between DINZ and NZDFA. Recalling the “respected and cohesive industry” scorecard from the 2019 conference, he saw improvements in a couple of areas: how the industry is respected by others, and sustainable practice on farm. Productivity was increasing well, but in terms of industry cohesiveness Pearce said some DFA branches were struggling to get deer farmers involved in activities.

He said the 2019 conference was also notable for its inclusiveness and activities where all participants were engaged and encouraged to take part, for example in building an environmental scorecard for the



Tony Pearce: DFA/DINZ relationship continues to work well.

industry. Reports from P2P – both on farm and in market – were also encouraging.

The current negative political and societal pressure on livestock farming was occupying a lot of time for DINZ and NZDFA, he noted.

The only disappointment from last year's conference was the lack of interest by any government ministers in attending – one of the main reasons for hosting the conference in Wellington.

The joint involvement of DINZ and NZDFA in the annual Next Generation and Branch Chairs/New Faces events will continue.

Pearse said the 2019 Next Generation event attracted record numbers. The power of genetic improvement, succession planning and the value of integrity and reputation were strong themes. The Next Generation programme also hosts part of the Future Farmers Experience tour, which introduces young people to the deer industry. (The recently held 2020 Next Generation programme was hosted in Central Hawke's Bay and featured visits to Smedley Station and Temco Agriculture, with the Rural Support Trust and banking sector also involved.)

The 2019 October Branch Chairs and New Faces Conference involved a wide range of agricultural organisations and key government departments as well as a constructive workshop on deer wintering, Pearse reported. The New Faces initiative, co-funded by DINZ and NZDFA since 2006, provides an introduction and pathway for leadership roles.

The close relationship between DINZ and DFA was particularly fruitful when it comes to developing a joint approach to industry submissions in areas such as NAIT, freshwater reforms and regional plans. The support of Lindsay Fung and Catharine Sayer was invaluable in this regard, Pearse said. DINZ and NZDFA's complementary representations were reflected in the final outcomes of the freshwater reforms, showing the value of this collaboration.

All of this work was underpinned by good communication via both print (*Deer Industry News*) and electronic (*Stagline-Online*) communication. Pearse said a succession of talented communication and administration staff within DINZ had helped make this possible.

Answering follow-up questions, Pearse confirmed:

- **The 2021 deer industry conference** will be at the Bill Richardson Transport World in Invercargill on 18–19 May, with the National Technical Workshop on the 20th. The conference will also host the launch of Lynda Gray's upcoming book celebrating 50 years of deer farming.
- **The 2021 Rising Stars** antler event (cancelled in 2020 because of Covid) is planned at this stage to be held in April at Cromwell. The later timing is to make it easier to accommodate fresh hard antler so it is properly stripped.

CARLA's here!

It's official: Progeny of high-CARLA sires can grow better. That was the much-anticipated take-out message from **AgResearch farm systems scientist, Jamie Ward** during the first conference stream. Ward said he was both excited and relieved to bring the news from a just-completed trial he led at Invermay, confirming that progeny of high-CARLA sires grow faster, better and more profitably than low-CARLA animals given the same conditions. This is thanks to their greater resistance to internal parasites, a

tool they carry around in their DNA.

And there's been a bonus discovery too. Not only does a high CARLA level provide some protection against gastrointestinal parasites, as had been anticipated, but it also turns out to give some relief from lungworm – a major productivity cost in young deer. Ward told *Deer Industry News* that while they had hoped CARLA might help against lungworm, this was the first research work to confirm it.

The presence of CARLA in ruminants including deer has been known about for years and the saliva swab test for it was borrowed from Beef+Lamb NZ, which developed it for the sheep industry. CARLA was included in the 2012–2014 Deer Progeny Test and since then it's been hoped that higher levels of the antigen in deer would be associated with better productivity outcomes through lower parasite burdens (lungworm and gastrointestinal).

A CARLA breeding value was developed and has been used by some Deer Select breeders since 2017.

But does it confer a proven productivity advantage in deer? That has been the missing link in the CARLA story for deer and it's why Deer Select has until now been using the qualifier "Research"



Higher CARLA breeding values will help protect young deer from the impact of internal parasites. Photo by Leeann Lott, entry in 2020 MSD Animal Health photo awards.

for the CARLA estimated breeding value (eBV). Now that can be dropped – the CARLA eBV now has the same status as other Deer Select breeding values.

So what did the Invermay research show?

The trial using 251 weaned red deer took place over 32 weeks, from March until slaughter in late October. During this period, growth in young deer can be seriously limited by heavy parasite burdens.

The results showed that not only did high-CARLA progeny have lower parasite burdens and excrete fewer eggs or larvae in their faeces to re-infect pastures, but they also grew bigger and faster. The potential benefits from liveweight gains, when extrapolated over the whole venison industry, can be measured in the millions of dollars, but even on a per-animal basis the genetic trait could increase value, Ward explained.

Key findings included:

- **Lungworm:** for every three-fold increase in CARLA levels there was a drop of 14 percent in larval counts by April and a 50 percent drop by June.
- **Gastrointestinal parasites:** for every three-fold increase in CARLA levels there was a drop of 18 percent in faecal egg counts by April and a 30 percent drop by June.

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Conference: continued

- **Liveweight gains:** for every three-fold increase in CARLA levels, stags gained an extra 7 percent and hinds 4 percent of liveweight between weaning and slaughter.

Ward said the economic gains from high-CARLA progeny were clear. “Our modelling showed that carcass values were \$5.58–\$22.96 higher per animal, but the economic gains were actually greater than that because the high-CARLA animals used less feed and could be finished from 13 to 55 days earlier.”

He said the increased marginal value per animal was anywhere from \$10 to nearly \$42 when savings in feed costs were taken into account.

What is CARLA?*

The larvae of gastrointestinal parasites and lungworm have a sheath that protects them from the environment when they are still on pasture. A few days after L3-stage larvae have been ingested by a grazing animal they shed this sheath. They then develop inside the animal into adults before reproducing. The sheath includes an antigen, the **Carbohydrate Larval Antigen (CarLA)**. Ruminants, including deer, produce an antibody in their saliva in response to CarLA. It binds to the sheath and limits the parasite’s ability to establish in the gut. The trait for levels of CARLA in deer at 10 months of age is moderately heritable and there is wide variation in CARLA production between animals.

Ward was at pains to point out that the proven value of high CARLA levels does not mean that farmers can stop drenching their growing deer against internal parasites. “It’s a very important addition to the toolkit, which also includes use of effective drenches, good biosecurity and grazing management. But over time, as the genetic gains from high-CARLA sires can be permanently locked into the national herd, reliance on drenches may decrease.”

He said reducing parasite burdens on young deer through genetics also has important welfare benefits.

“I’m very excited by the potential this offers deer farmers. The industry has been waiting for some time to find out if CARLA could make a difference. This shows it will have a big part to play in a well-designed integrated parasite management programme that includes grazing management and judicious use of drenches.”

Marked lift in velvet quality and quantity: Catharine Sayer

Does the way you farm velvet affect the composition and quality of the antler? It’s been nearly 30 years since that was investigated and DINZ science and policy manager Catharine Sayer reported on new research into composition and farm systems.

Velvet Antler Research NZ (VARNZ) looked at antler samples from six farms, noting:

- farm systems
- herd parentage
- time of cutting since button drop

The results were “surprisingly positive” Sayer said. “The bioactive organic fraction of the components – lipid and protein – is significantly greater now than in 1991.”

Protein was up by 25 percent and lipid by 4 percent. The inactive ash proportion – the fraction that isn’t wanted – was down by 10 percent, a “step in the right direction”.

* The definition of CARLA in the printed issue of *Deer Industry News* was incorrect. The above has now been corrected.

In addition, the upper portion of antlers today now contains more bioactive substances than were found in the whole antler in 1991.

Looking at typical velvet antler then and now, Sayer said the more valuable upper beam made up 38 percent of the whole stick in 1991, but 47.5 percent today. In addition, today’s upper beam contains a much higher proportion of protein (71.2 percent) compared with 58.1 percent in 1991. These results could encourage buyers of significant volumes to be sophisticated enough to be able to tailor different parts of the stick to particular products they market.

But is quality consistent across farms? Sayer reported that across the whole stick there is similarity in composition between red deer farms, but some minor variation between composition in parts of the antler.



Efforts by farmers are being rewarded through higher-quality velvet. Photo by Grant Charteris, entrant in 2020 MSD Animal Health photo awards.

She said neither genetics nor feed (PKE-finishing versus pasture finishing) seemed to affect quality, and while it wasn’t a formal feed study by any means, the preliminary signal on feed use may be some comfort to those forced to use supplementary feed during drought.

Farmers appeared to have nailed the correct cutting dates for optimum velvet quality, she said. As expected, the “Velvet Activity Index” (VAI) was highest for the tips, then upper and trez tynes, and lowest for the base and brow tynes.

Analysis showed that the highest proportion of bioactive components was being found in antler cut at the correct dates based on the current velvet grading guidelines, and then declining as time elapsed. An exception was for the tips if overgrown: the VAI remained high in tips for a period after the optimal cutting date.

In summary:

- efforts to improve farm systems are being rewarded through higher quality in velvet
- there is consistency in quality between animals and farms
- our velvet is a premium ingredient, thanks to the investment farmers are making in their systems.

Questions on the work were fielded by AgResearch senior scientist Stephen Haines, and Rhys Griffiths and Tony Pearse from DINZ.

Were comparisons done between NZ, Russian and Chinese velvet composition as they had been in 1991?

The comparison would be very interesting but unfortunately the budget didn't allow for that this time. New Zealand antler compared very favourably with Chinese in 1991. It's hoped to do a comparison with Chinese antler soon, although accessing the product may be difficult. It will be interesting to see what gains have been made in China compared with here.

How is this composition information used in the market?

It is good to be able to show companies in overseas markets how our velvet composition has improved, to help shape our brand. We will definitely be taking this information into the marketplace.

What take-home messages should deer farmers get from this work?

The amazing power of selection for velvet style, weight and quality. This also really vindicates the grading chart and confirms that genetics for quality have been captured.

Can stag diet affect velvet quality?

That's indicated in the literature, but a controlled nutrition study would be needed. Although PKE was considered in this study it was only on one farm and the diet wasn't scientifically controlled so it wasn't a true comparison. Big changes in composition caused by diet aren't likely.

Positive future for velvet: Rhys Griffiths

The global impacts of Covid-19 have been significant and the velvet sector has been affected. However, more new products have been developed this year signalling a positive future for the ingredient, DINZ manager, markets Rhys Griffiths reported.

DINZ's general "three-Cs" approach to the pandemic – China, channels and customers – is guiding the global marketing recovery for the New Zealand deer industry's products.

While less affected by Covid-19 than other product groups, "velvet wasn't immune," he explained.

The main concerns for velvet were: the economic impacts on consumers; supply chain disruptions in China and South Korea that included impacts to airfreight; and how the industry connects with its customers for promotional planning.

To keep customers engaged during lockdown, Griffiths had worked with DINZ's in-market representatives to host a virtual market visit of South Korea, meeting with 12 key customers in the food and oriental medicine fields, as well as a couple of importers over the period.

During those meetings, customers had the opportunity to hear directly from DINZ science and policy manager Catharine Sayer and environmental stewardship manager Lindsay Fung.

"It was a great chance to manage customer relationships and provided a novelty feature," he said.

While New Zealand velvet's sales via bricks and mortar stores had been affected and fewer older people were visiting the traditional Oriental Medicine Doctors for fear of getting Covid-19, "both have rebounded somewhat now," said Griffiths.

"On the positive side, online and home-shopping channels

increased their sales. Perceived as providing immune function properties, the products were in higher demand."

The largest exporters were reporting all product has now been sold, although a little slower than in 2019, he said. DINZ estimates 2020 velvet production will be up to around 850 tonnes – from 803 tonnes last year.

While prices were back this year on last year's high, this is due to supply chain disruptions, rather than any potential downsides on consumption, he said.

"In fact, there have been more products – seven – launched over the course of this year, even during the course of the Covid outbreak, that contain and promote New Zealand velvet."

He paints a positive future for velvet, which has doubled in volume and more than tripled in value in the past eight years.

While too early to make predictions for next season, Griffiths commented: "We know consumers use New Zealand velvet for immune function, that underlying consumer demand remains strong and the farmgate value for the New Zealand velvet industry is strong at over \$100 million.

"We've come a long way from a few years ago when the industry was at that \$30 million mark and decreasing."

DINZ's new velvet composition research (see page 6), which Korean importers heard about during the Korean e-market visit, was also viewed positively by velvet marketers.



Advertising for one of the new velvet products recently launched in Korea.



DINZ manager, markets Rhys Griffiths reported to deer farmers virtually at this year's deer industry conference.

"In the long term, it will be very beneficial for us," said Colin Stevenson, Director of CK Import Export Co NZ during the panel discussion. "There's a big push in the markets looking at products with health benefits."

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Conference: continued

Alpine Deer's Hugh Signal felt prospects for co-products remain particularly strong too, despite Covid-19.

"Co-products are immune-boosting. As we move through the Northern Hemisphere summer to autumn, we expect consumption – and the will to consume – to be as great as ever, if not greater," he said, noting there are still challenges ahead.

Responding to a question about whether velvet sticks are getting too big too quickly, Ross Chambers of Provelco said the increasing weights per stag have helped increase the total tonnage produced.

"As a rule of thumb, traditional sticks are more versatile and sought after," he said.

However, some buyers are more adaptable than others.

"If we want to maximise the opportunity for velvet, style is important. Non-traditional grades are less flexible for the primary use and less attractive for some buyers."

P2P Farm performance: Phil McKenzie

Farm performance manager, Phil McKenzie acknowledged the impact of the 2020 drought on farmers throughout New Zealand and said the networks and friendships that had built up through P2P can help provide support where it's needed.

While unwelcome, Covid-19 had led the industry to new ways of interacting, "from being outstanding in the field to outstanding on the small screen," McKenzie said. "I'm hoping we can continue some of that online interaction as we move back to face-to-face meetings."

He announced that the Ministry for Primary Industries had approved a 12-month extension of the P2P programme in light of the disruption caused by the pandemic. The programme will now run until 30 June 2023.

The Advance Parties (APs) had been a flagship initiative for P2P. The planned regional forums for AP chairs had been

stymied by Covid, but were replaced by a series of online forums organised by Pania Flint. "Lots of people joined in and we had some great conversations once everyone got used to it. One person commented that working online like this makes it feel like they are part of a nationwide team, not just a local AP."

He urged deer farmers to tap into the expertise that's been made available through the P2P programme.

McKenzie added that the setting up of 14 P2P Deer Industry Environment Groups had been a real highlight. Partnerships with NZDFA and MPI had been critical to getting things done, he added.

Two people who took part in last year's P2P Innovation Workshops talked about their experience. The aim of the workshops was to help improve networking and personal development among future leaders. After the workshops, participants took part in one of four mini-projects focusing on community, industry change, consumers, and stories, perceptions and values.

Sarah How (DairyNZ) and **Millie How** (Ballance Agri-Nutrients) took part in the "stories, perceptions and values" project. (The two are sisters-in-law, hence the common surname.)

Millie told the conference the group was a great way to bring like-minded people together with a diversity of thinking and chew the fat on ways to promote the venison industry. "Everyone's been very open to sharing ideas and we've been spoiled by having presenters like Ceri Evans speak to us."

Sarah How said the group realised most people knew little about the deer industry, which left it vulnerable to misconceptions about the environment, welfare and so on. She said the group was focused on how the industry could tell its story to the New Zealand public.

Millie How said the group talked about brand values including an industry based on family farms producing high-quality protein with a low environmental footprint, and people who enjoy what

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New Strainrite deer posts

STRAINRITE FENCING SYSTEMS is a leading New Zealand agricultural equipment manufacturer, with a history dating back to the early 1970s. Renowned for innovation, the company designs and builds an extensive range of fencing tools and equipment. They are always looking for ways to improve your experience and are well known for quality fencing products built to the requirements of the farming sector.

With a focus on product development and innovation, Strainrite Fencing Systems listens to what farmers and fencing contractors have to say, and delivers market-leading fencing products that withstand tough and demanding farming conditions across New Zealand, Australia, Canada, United States, United Kingdom and Europe.

Strainrite's fencing tools and equipment are designed by farmers, for farmers. They understand their customer needs, and continually refine their products to ensure they deliver the best results.

Recently the company has developed a new deer post. Strainrite Deer Posts have been tried and tested in Canada where they are sold as "Buffalo Posts". Used in snow and extreme Canadian

weather conditions, they have stood up to the test. Standing 1750mm high and using the same construction as their Dura-top range, the Dura-top head is designed to reduce tangling and eliminate wear. The steel foot is uniquely designed to maximise ground holding and manufactured from hot dipped galvanised pressed steel.

Also designed to fit their popular Clip-On Insulators (sold separately), they easily clip on to enable multiple wires.

Strainrite's products include wire tensioning, wire jennys and electric fencing, along with fencing tools and equipment. From strainers, crimps, pigtail posts and drivers, through to energisers and cable, Strainrite is your one-stop shop for all fencing tools and equipment needs. Contact your local rural retail supply store to purchase or order in.

An extensive range of instructional videos is available online with step-by-step instructions on using Strainrite's specialty fencing products. ■

For more information about Strainrite Fencing Systems, visit www.strainrite.co.nz

• Article supplied



DEER POST

1750mm

Proudly New Zealand Made.

Our new Deer post uses the same construction as our Dura-top range, with its unique all steel loop and proven press formed foot.

Contact your local rural supply store to purchase.

***Please note clip on insulators are sold separately.**



1750mm



**Check out our whole range at
www.strainrite.co.nz**

Conference: continued



Millie How (top) and Sarah How shared their thoughts on being part of the P2P Innovation Workshop.

they do. She said the passion and pride deer farmers had for their animals and the sustainable way they were farmed needed to be communicated better.

Target audiences included university students, and two Lincoln University classes are the focus for a pilot project. “We want to see how they perceive the venison industry and then talk about how we could better promote our story and values.” The feedback from the students on what influences them will inform a communication plan for 18–35-year-olds, our future consumers.

Sarah How said health benefits and environmental values were likely to feature in the students’ thinking. Getting young people’s attention was a challenge because there is already a lot of noise and messaging to compete with.

She was impressed at how agile the small deer industry is, and the way they had been able to bring together future leaders. She said that bringing in outside experts such as Ceri Evans was a great way to disrupt thinking within our own “echo chamber” and introduce new perspectives.

The way that any enhanced communications strategy for the industry could be funded has not been discussed at this stage.

Recently taking part in a Big Deer Tour was Southland-based DairyNZ’s **Hugh Jackson**, who spoke to **Nicola McGrouther** of Creekside Consulting. Although working in the dairy industry, Hugh’s interests range right across the livestock sector including deer. His interest was piqued when he studied a sheep, beef and deer farm during his university studies into agricultural production systems.

He said he was struck by the diversity of income streams within the deer industry and would like to be involved in the industry one day. Hugh also took part in a recent online Rural Professionals’ environmental workshop, which reinforced for him the importance of good management practices. Seeing photo examples and meeting a range of farmers online was really useful, he said.

Environment – getting our story across: Lindsay Fung

DINZ environment stewardship manager **Lindsay Fung** reported that good progress had been made on environmental regulation at regional level, but central government policy was still presenting challenges.

Fung said the industry has a long history of environmental stewardship. Under the strategic goal of a confident, growing [and sustainable] deer industry came the guiding principle of “doing the right thing”. Not only did our doing the right thing need to be recognised, but there needed to be reasonable, practical rules in place to make this possible.

He said the good progress being made at regional plan level wasn’t universal, but where there were issues it was mainly because regional plans were still awaiting environment court appeal decisions. Canterbury remains a concern. “The numerous plan changes for sub-regions are quite challenging.”

Submissions and representations in person at regional plan hearings over the past five years were mainly concerned with stock exclusion and winter grazing. Grandparenting of nitrogen pollution was an issue in some regions.

Fung said there are still concerns for the Otago region (due a major regional plan review) and Southland, where nutrient limits are still to be introduced. He said DINZ and NZDFA branches were establishing good relationships with councillors and staff, and initiatives like catchment workshops, auditor training and the Southland Environment Advance party were all helping in this respect.

Central government policies remained a significant concern in three areas: freshwater management, indigenous biodiversity and greenhouse gas emissions. A key objective was to ensure the deer industry plays its part along with all New Zealanders, while making sure regulations achieve their purpose without imposing unnecessary costs or compliance.

He noted there had been some success with upcoming freshwater management regulations, including the lack of stock exclusion (mostly) on land over 10° slope, and no grandparenting for high polluters. Some issues remained, though, including:

- stock exclusion in flat areas such as on the West Coast and South Island high country (especially in low-impact areas)
- stock exclusion of some wetlands
- resource consent requirements for winter grazing on slopes over 10°.

Indigenous biodiversity policy was likely to be decided after the election and wasn’t such a high government priority, but Fung said concerns remained about establishment of significant natural areas and control over activities near these.

Greenhouse gas emissions presented a potentially big challenge. Fung said the He Waka Eke Noa partnership between the Government, Maori and industry was designed to help all farms know their emissions by the end of 2022, and all having a plan in place to manage emissions by the start of 2025.

Working within Deer Industry Environment Groups gives farmers a head start in working out how these policy changes might affect them, he said.

In discussion, Phil McKenzie noted that on-farm environment work was not new to farming, but it was being treated differently now. “It will always be a part of farming.”

Fung concluded by noting DINZ and NZDFA were working with regulators to tell a positive story through “deer 101” farm visits for officials and training days for regional council auditors. He said policy makers and regulators didn’t understand farm systems and what drove profitability, and it was up to the industry to educate them.

“When we’ve done that we’ve got some real cut-through. We have a good story and farmers should be proud of what they’re doing. It’s up to all of us to get that message across,” he concluded.

Deer Industry Environment Groups Q+A:

Emma Buchanan (Soter Rural Compliance) and Porangahau farmer **Gretchen King** fielded questions on Deer Industry Environment Groups (DIEGs). King said each farm visit in her DIEG focused on a theme such as critical source areas and a take-home lesson.

Buchanan said farmers doing their Farm Environment Plans as part of the group got a head start with things like nutrient budgeting and took more ownership of the plan than if a consultant had done it for them. Having a biodiversity expert within Gretchen’s group was a great help, she added. “He identified a particularly significant area on one of the farms and was able to help get protection set up for it.”

King said being in the group helped them see things like their fencing layout through fresh eyes. “We also ended up creating a catchment group in our community, which hadn’t been on our radar at all.”

Venison: Disruptions remain, but opportunities too

It’s going to be a tough year ahead for venison, but there’s plenty of opportunity, e-delegates heard. DINZ’s joint promotion fund has been increased to nearly \$500,000 in a bid to help venison exporters deal with the post-Covid-19 fallout in markets around the world.

DINZ venison marketing manager **Nick Taylor**’s online presentation showed foodservice continued to be disrupted around the globe with – at the time of writing – local lockdowns being re-introduced in the United States, Australia and elsewhere and European restaurants at socially-distanced dining levels.

Unfortunately, this disruption for New Zealand venison will remain for some time, Taylor believes. He pointed to Mintel market research showing the severe impact of the virus on global foodservice. This will shift the focus to off-premise solutions



While Covid-19 disruption will last for some time, it will only be temporary, Taylor said.

– such as retail, home meal kits and takeaways – until at least the end of this year. Then the expected recession will reduce the number of restaurants and lower discretionary spending by consumers for the next one to two years, they predict.

“But, this is going to be short-term only,” said Taylor, pointing to a US survey in early June that showed 40 percent of respondents were most looking forward to visiting a restaurant once social distancing was relaxed. Since the presentation, Mintel has predicted total US foodservice sales to rebound to pre-pandemic levels by 2023, with limited-service restaurants, including fast food and fast casual restaurants, bouncing back more quickly and representing a notably larger share of the market.

“Restaurants are in the business of bringing people together and creating a unique experience for them. It is not something we can recreate at home.”

In the meantime, venison marketers have been looking for new retail and manufacturing opportunities and DINZ has been working to support their change in target market.

As a result, DINZ has increased its joint promotion fund to nearly half a million dollars, Taylor announced. This has supported several new initiatives from companies including: exploration of new online direct-to-consumer sales channels in New Zealand and Australia; retail promotional activities in Europe and New Zealand; and expanded digital promotional activities in the United States and Europe.

DINZ is working on a number of other initiatives to support venison marketing companies:

- **Europe:** Shannon Campbell has been working with German restaurants, selected with exporters and their importers and wholesalers, to develop new venison recipes that could work for them on their menus. Campbell spends the day with the chef, capturing images and video footage to share with the restaurant, the wholesaler and importer to use on their social media channels. The approached chefs were all excited to take up the opportunity, reported Taylor.
- Looking ahead to the European game season, DINZ seasonal work is supporting importers with sales calls and chef workshops and is also developing promotional activities targeted at consumers. “With experts predicting social distancing measures may still be in place by October, there will be more focus on home cooking.”
- **United States:** The home meal kit business has expanded over lockdown with consumers finding them of high quality. With this growth expected to continue, DINZ is exploring opportunities for New Zealand venison in its market diversification programme, “especially where the product can add a point of uniqueness valued by the company and their customers”.
- **China:** Taylor is keen for the sector to keep its “foot on the accelerator” in the emerging venison market. A new website and education material are under development, along with resources specific for Chinese social media channels such as WeChat. Chef research has pinpointed the Sichuan culinary style from mid-China as holding potential for New Zealand venison. Taylor is keen to explore this and is encouraging the venison companies to do the same. However, there is a big education task ahead as the research also re-confirmed that many Chinese chefs don’t know how to use venison.

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Conference: continued



One of Shannon Campbell's tailor-made recipe inspirations for a German chef, venison pate and cured venison, showed how they could use New Zealand venison in different ways to game.

- DINZ is working with NZTE on a workshop to be held in Shanghai in the next few months (Covid permitting) targeting high-end and innovative chefs.
- Work is also underway looking at Chinese perceived health benefits for venison. "It's not in the same traditional Chinese medicine market as velvet, but is adjacent, so we want to explore what this means and if it opens up any potential markets for us," said Taylor.

Tough year ahead, but there's huge opportunity

"With foodservice disrupted, this is a big deal for the industry and will affect the chilled programme with sea freight disrupted and airfreight more expensive. This year's going to be tough," predicted **Mountain River Venison's John Sadler** in the panel discussion.

Alliance Group export sales manager for venison Terry O'Connell agreed. "Some of our key importers are reticent to engage because they are worried about a second wave," he said.

Venison is in the functional/healthy food market and this is where a lot of effort can go, **First Light Foods general manager venison sales and supply Toni Frost** believes.

"DINZ has put out some amazing nutritional material that I've been sharing with our customers. It's hitting the right programme that will be the challenge. It may take 12-18 months for foodservice to come right again, but of course, people will still want to continue eating."

Exporters were asked what their number one lesson was from the pandemic. Their answers suggested the sector needs a diversity of sales channels, the flexibility to change products and ways of delivering them, agility and to have solid relationships with, and be trusting of, its customers.

"Be supportive and make sure they come out on the other side of the pandemic as well," noted **Jared Sandri, marketing and logistics manager for Duncan NZ**.

"It's been a challenging situation in a whole range of markets," concluded Taylor. For him, what was underscored was the importance of DINZ market diversification work.

"It takes time and energy but there's huge opportunity," he said.

"We have a fantastic product, fantastic story and fantastic farmers who are supplying it. I think we are well placed to keep moving that story forward."

Challenges for pivot

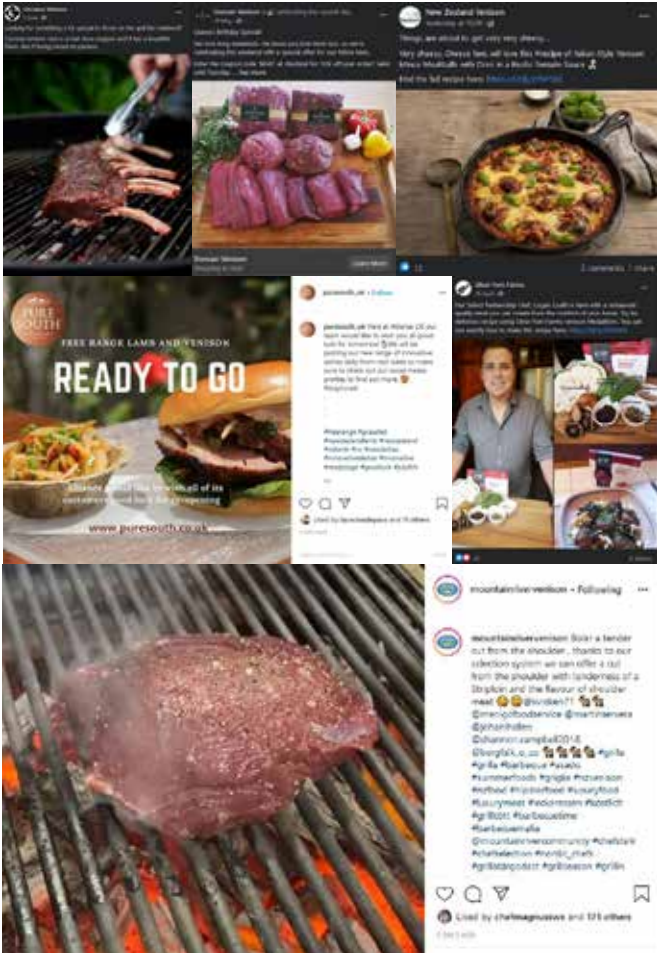
The venison panel discussion revealed the exporters' forced and abrupt pivot for venison to other channels presents challenges, on which they are hard at work.

- Silver Fern Farms sees huge opportunities for venison in China in the foodservice manufacturing sector, said the company's China Sales Manager Glen McLennan. It is also expanding its successful retail-ready range of packaged meat cuts, including venison, already sold in Europe and New Zealand to the US retail marketplace. And it is creating its own e-commerce platform for that market, he said.
- For First Light Foods, having an agent with a team of five on the ground in the United States has helped enormously and Frost said it is the answer to maintaining growth in retail sales there. "Retail is not an easy solution for venison overnight. It needs a strategic, planned approach to get consumers used to eating venison at retail. We have sufficient confidence that it will continue and we want to invest in the channel, starting with building awareness with the lower-value convenience products," she said.
- Most meat sold in Europe for retail is in chilled form, noted Sadler. With lengthening and uncertain sea freight journey times, and higher airfreight costs, the company is trialling selling tempered, marinated frozen product at retail, he reported.
- "The main challenge is truly understanding the motivation and needs of modern consumers in various cultures, which all takes increased resource and infrastructure," said O'Connell. He sees the traceability and cold supply chain story as especially important now consumers are becoming more knowledgeable about where their products come from and the back story. "This will be magnified in a post-Covid marketplace," he said. Alliance remains fully committed to the product and has been working with UK chefs on a new sous-vide high-protein option, coupled with convenience.
- More product has been sold by all exporters at retail in New Zealand (see *Deer Industry News*, July/August 2020). Duncan NZ's focus on the home market includes selling through its own website and direct online retailers Container Door and Grab One, said Sandri. There were some initial issues with couriers, which had been caught unawares by the massively increased deliveries, but have now adjusted their services.

Chilled season certainty growing

Deer Industry News talked further to some of the venison marketers, who are offering contracts for the 2020 chilled season. There's increased, yet cautious, confidence in the Covid-19 marketplace which, as the deer industry conference session suggested, will still present challenges.

Having confirmed orders for the traditional chilled season gives



Just a few examples of social media promotion of New Zealand's premium venison from DINZ and venison marketers over the past couple of months.

Silver Fern Farms confidence in its venison markets, **Silver Fern Farms** China sales manager Glen McLennan told *Deer Industry News* after the deer industry conference sessions.

“Consequently, we are pleased to be issuing our 2020 venison global supply contract,” he said.

“We know it will be important to target the September/October sea freight period, as the airfreight window still holds some uncertainty. Pricing will reflect the need to drive volume into these two critical months.”

Silver Fern Farms recently partnered with Gourmet Direct, a New Zealand online store specialising in premium New Zealand meat products, to deliver its Silver Fern Farms full grass-fed retail range right to doorsteps (including rural addresses). The winter retail promotion gives consumers the chance to win one of 100 Le Creuset Cast Iron Signature Casseroles when they purchase any Silver Fern Farms retail pack.

McLennan also reported Silver Fern Farms’ domestic retail relationships have strengthened, as Covid-19 has seen more consumers choosing to cook at home.

The venison market remains challenging due to Covid-19’s disruption of the global foodservice sector, commented Danny Hailes, general manager livestock and shareholder services at **Alliance Group**.

“However, there are green shoots of positivity as we continue

to diversify. North America and Europe are showing some signs of improvement and our team is continuing negotiations for chilled venison.”

Reiterating the co-operative’s commitment to the New Zealand deer industry, Hailes said it continues to have a strong level of confidence in the sector.

“Alliance Group offered a deer supply contract. Our contracts are designed to give our farmers certainty. They protect the farmer from any downside in the market, while allowing them to participate in any upside,” he said.

While a little later than usual, **Duncan NZ** has also mailed out its annual 12-month supply contract applications and has been getting a good response, wrote chief executive Andy Duncan in the company’s latest update for suppliers.

Negotiations for the upcoming European chilled season have been more protracted this year with concerns about a potential second wave of Covid-19 as lockdown restrictions ease and summer holidays start, he reported.

“Encouragingly, agreements are being concluded with European customers to kick off the EU chilled season in time,” he said, warning however it is too early to know how volumes will hold up as the European autumn approaches.

The Duncan NZ update notes high Covid infection rates in many US states mean the restaurant sector there is yet to open in a meaningful way. In addition, it flags that high levels of border inspections and import sampling in China – instigated over fears the virus could be foodborne – are apparently slowing uptake of trim items there. Meanwhile, skins continue to face challenges from competing synthetic materials, a vegan movement and change in the fashion industry.

More positively, Duncan NZ is encouraged by progress made in its new relationships with online retailers here in New Zealand.

It is also cheered petfood demand is starting to see inventory move through the system, with sales increasing to end consumers, “particularly as pet food spending at retail does not seem to be Covid-affected,” said Andy Duncan.



Alliance Group continues to be committed to the venison sector, said Alliance’s general manager livestock and shareholder services, Danny Hailes. This is underlined, he says, by the cooperative’s strengthening of its venison sales and marketing programme, opening the new, modern \$15.9 million venison processing plant at Lorneville in 2018 and the subsequent increase in processing capacity there.

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Hawke's Bay hosts industry up-and-comers

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Hawke's Bay turned on the sunshine and hospitality for the eighth annual NZDFA Next Generation programme, attended by 44, plus DINZ staff, NZDFA Executive Committee, speakers and farm hosts. The group included five young guests on the DINZ-hosted Future Deer Farmers Experience who were finishing a week's total immersion in the deer industry.



Next Generation attendees enjoyed excellent weather during the farm visits to Smedley Station and Temco Agriculture.

AS WE WERE right on our publication deadline during the programme this will be a brief summary only – we'll cover aspects of the event in more depth in our October issue.

Farm tours

First stop on 6 August was Smedley Station, Tikokino. The 5,554-hectare property (3,606 effective) winters 30,000 stock units including 700 velvetting stags and 500 red hinds, numbers that have been built up quite quickly over the past 5 years. Cadets are there for two years, with an intake of 13 per year and 26 in residence at any one time.

Manager Rob Evans and wife Jenn Evans talked to visitors about life and routines on the station. Rob said the cadets learn practical skills in their first year and focus on stock skills in Year 2.

Smedley was hit by the Hawke's Bay drought along with the rest of the region, getting only a fraction of their normal rainfall so far in 2020. Rob said their 140 hectares of Raphno "saved us big time". Like many deer farms in the area, bought-in maize silage and PKE helped keep their stock going.

Level 4 Covid Lockdown saw Smedley creating its own "bubble" of more than 50. Cadets were offered the option of heading home for the duration but all elected to stay. Jenn Evans said normal routines were maintained as much as possible with special activities such as hunting, cricket games and quiz nights organised for the weekends. The 9 weeks they were isolated flew by.

During the afternoon the Next Generation team travelled the short distance to the adjoining Te Maire farm (Temco Agriculture)

of George Williams and Laura Billings. George told the group that while they got through the drought relatively well, it was mentally and physically tough.

They cut down their hind herd by 300 and bought in PKE for the first time. "Our total extra feed cost was about \$150,000, or \$10 a stock unit," he said. Having had a good run of seasons over the past 10 years meant they were fairly well placed to withstand the impact of the drought.

- To see short interviews with Next Generation attendees and Rob Evans visit the Next Generation NZ Deer Farmers Facebook page: www.facebook.com/groups/799092420135777/



Rob and Jenn Evans, Smedley Station.

Workshop session

The programme moved indoors for day two with a varied and interactive series of activities.

First up was the Hawke's Bay Rural Support Trust's **Dave Todd**, who reiterated the trust's gratitude for NZDFA's generous \$10,000 donation for its work (by contrast the annual government contribution for their work is only \$8,000). He said people who were struggling to cope sometimes resisted help because "there's always someone worse off". Being willing to ask for help was vital. "That way you're giving permission for people who want to help to actually do something."

Dave said we are all now very well connected through technology, but there's no substitute for face-to-face interaction.

He was followed by Rabobank's senior agribusiness manager **Peter Young**, who took attendees through a simple budgeting exercise based on leasing land to finish some livestock. When the bank was considering an application for finance they wanted to know three things, Young said: "What's it for, how long do you need it for, and how will you pay it back?"



There were plenty of laughs shared during the workshop session.

He said the bank was also interested in how return on capital stacked up. "And security is important to us."

Beef + Lamb NZ's Mark Harris told attendees that the key to getting ideas actioned was to share them, turning "dreams into plans".

Vet Services (HB) director **Richard Hilson** took the group through a quiz testing knowledge on everything from the identity of some minor-species antlers to the relative heights and names of key DINZ staff. He also talked through the serious side of drought impacts and shared some recent and historic scanning data. The drought had cost Hawke's Bay sheep farmers up to 250,000 lambs this year, he said.

Richard also had some good advice on mating success with deer, especially with tips on getting younger animals socialised well in advance of the rut.

Patrick Crawshaw of First Light gave attendees another good brain workout with a quiz testing knowledge of everything from capital cities to identifying venison cuts. "Brand New Zealand is very important to us," he noted.

DINZ CEO **Innes Moffat** ended proceedings by getting the attendees to work in groups to question DINZ's four key strategic goals. He then gamely took on the challenge of answering these in short order as the clock for a very engaging and entertaining second day ran down.

- The 2020 NZDFA Next Generation programme was hosted with assistance from DINZ and generous sponsorship from Vet Services (HB), the South Canterbury/North Otago (SCNO), Taihape and Hawke' Bay branches of NZDFA, First Light Foods and Silver Fern Farms. Special guests at the programme were Graham and Sharon Peck of NZDFA's SCNO branch, which organised a major shipment of supplement to Hawke's Bay during the drought. ■

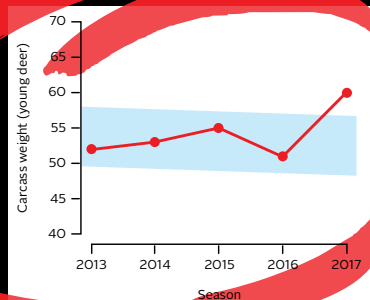
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Celebrating six: Lessons in resilience

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Members of the Hawke's Bay Originals Advance Party (HBOAP) gathered at Forest Road Farm, Tikokino on 10 July to reflect on how they'd dealt with the drought and celebrate their sixth year. It's been a rough few months for most, but they were able to show the value of good, early decision making and staying connected with your mates.

AND SPEAKING OF mates, the camaraderie that's developed between the Hawke's Bay deer farmers and their southern neighbours continued with a guest appearance from Peel Forest Estate's Mark Tapley, who led an in-depth discussion on the benefits of Deer Select and DNA testing.



Part of the group of visitors to Forest Road Farm.

The HBOAP welcomed two sets of new members to the group: Matt and Elisha Wade, and Thomas and Gerald Wilson, who have joined the AP this year.

Grant and Sally Charteris's farm was still showing clear signs of the hammering the region has taken, but it also showed the value of making decisions early and thinking long term. They knew they had to relieve the pressure and pulled a number of levers to do so. Accepting the associated costs was a necessary part of the process, Grant said. Among their actions were:

- Getting 200 spikers away for grazing from early March (due back this month).
- Selling about one-third of their in-calf Herefords and sending the remaining 44 cows off for grazing (they'll build the herd back up to about 60–70 when they can).
- Buying in plenty of PKE, maize, baleage and hay ("I wish I'd bought more in November!").
- Dropping capital hind numbers by 100. Although the received price wasn't great, they got a premium on the works value and it has cleared the decks for prioritising velvet production in the coming season.
- Continuing a fertiliser programme, applying maintenance DAP in March with cobalt, copper and selenium, followed by 100kg/ha of phased nitrogen in May.

- Taking as much pressure off pastures as possible through destocking and using crop.

Grant said they'd fed 100 tonnes of PKE, 50 tonnes of maize and 400 bales of baleage since May. He estimates the cost of feed and grazing alone through the drought has been about \$150,000, but associated costs such as lower stock numbers have taken that total closer to \$250,000. Not acting decisively would have ultimately cost a lot more, he adds.



Stags were looking in good condition, despite the tough year so far.

Getting the balance between cattle and deer right has always been tricky, but experience is teaching them the value of cattle in the system, with trading stock useful during a growthy summer. They've also recently acquired 150 Wiltshire ewes and a few rams for tidying up and ragwort duties.

While drought and grass grub had left their mark, there was enough warmth left to promote some grass growth once the rains finally arrived. Visitors on the farm tour were impressed by the condition of the deer. The stags on kale and swedes were looking very good, as were the hinds, which had received plenty of supplementary feed while the pastures were being rested. The kale and swedes will probably be succeeded by Pasja for the yearling hinds in summer and then Shogun ryegrass.

Winters are probably too wet at Forest Road Farm for fodder beet, although Grant has committed to some lifted beet for his stags. One visitor commented that in principle it might be better to get maize or baleage when buying in supplement, as with fodder beet "you're paying to cart a lot of water".

The merits of strip tilling fodder beet were also discussed, where strips of grass are left between the rows of beet, providing

some protection for the soil and planted seed, while also helping minimise pugging. Only about 30–40 percent of the paddock is cultivated with this method.

Commenting on the experience of velvet producers in pen-feeding systems in China, DINZ producer manager Tony Pearse said the post-rut recovery period for stags laid a crucial platform for antler growth next spring, so it was good to see stags here being well looked after.



Young hinds at Forest Road Farm.



The Charterises have been keeping up with environmental work.

While dealing with the challenges of drought, Grant and Sally have been continuing their environmental enhancement programme, and the farm tour took in some of their recent planting and fencing. While a lot of new plants were lost to the dry – even mature trees were suffering – they’ve found through experience that flaxes, koromiko and pittosporums do best in their environment. They are continuing their programme of retiring and planting gullies and waterways.

While they aren’t able to blanket exclude stock from water on the farm, they do use a lot of dams and troughs to supply stock water. Grant said he’d like to start doing some regular quality testing for water entering and leaving the property.

Scanning not as bad as feared

Advance Party facilitator Richard Hilson led a discussion on the effects of the drought around the district on the breeding season. Surprisingly – and perhaps showing the value of good planning and response to the conditions – average scanning results for the AP group were down only slightly on the previous couple of years.

All but two of the nine farms that were recorded scanned between 97–100 percent for their mixed age hinds. The overall average for the group of 93.3 percent was about 4 percent higher than the district average this year. The group’s R2 scanning percentages were nearly 94 percent, again well clear of the district average and comparable with the previous two years.



Visitors enjoyed a comprehensive workshop on genetics and Deer Select.

Hilson said the rising plane of nutrition through mating is at least as important as the actual body condition score.

George Williams said he’d removed the stags on 30 April but still got great results – 99 percent for the mixed age hinds (stags joined late February) and 95 percent for the R2s (joining late January).

Ru Gaddum said they had been caught out badly during mating. “We thought we were summer safe!” He said they’d had to start feeding out about 2 weeks after the stags went in, and the disruption as the hinds rushed to the gate every day to greet the feed wagon helped push their scanning percentages well down. Harry Gaddum said they had also had a difficult mating season but found that things improved when they brought the hinds down from the hill and fed them on the flats.

Thomas Wilson said they had been rewarded by really feeding their hinds well from about mid-January.

Lessons from the drought

AP members had the following advice for others facing similar conditions:

- You can never over-invest in water infrastructure. Adding reticulated water also gives an opportunity to regularly clean out dams.
- Don’t skimp on supplements if you want to get hinds on a rising plane of nutrition for mating.
- Keep talking to your team and make sure you’re all on the same page, e.g., on decisions about water, feed or destocking. Have confidence in the people around you.

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Hawke's Bay OAP: continued

- Be proactive – let the condition of your animals inform your decision making and be sure you have an exit strategy available if you find yourself in a tight corner.
- Prioritise and decide which stock classes are expendable.
- Use the tools available to you for feed and financial budgeting and keep communicating. Back your decisions.
- Always keep feed on hand. You can sell a surplus in winter if you have too much.
- Banking feed (supplement) can be a lifesaver but don't hang onto baleage for too long. Rodents can get into it and spoil it. Covered silage can last for years though, so save it if you can during the good years.
- Keep networking, especially about feed availability. One member found a feed source via a chance conversation.
- Some decisions will be expensive, but once you've decided on a course, it can relieve some of the pressure on you.



Palm kernel played an important role in keeping deer well fed during the drought.

- Prioritise and plan 12 months ahead, but be prepared to be adaptable and don't be afraid to revisit decisions if conditions have changed.
- Accept that the decisions you make will cost you money.
- Consider changing your farm system to make you more adaptable, e.g. a larger trading component to turn on or off as conditions allow.

Value of Deer Select and DNA explained

Peel Forest Estate stud manager Mark Tapley is a big fan of Deer Select, which he said has massive benefits for both studs and commercial farmers, venison or velvet. "Anyone who is considering selling live stags should be part of the Deer Select platform," he told guests at the Hawke's Bay Originals Advance Party gathering.

Deer Select members pay an annual herd fee of \$260 and a basic per-animal cost of about \$33.50 (about \$55 if eye muscle area and CARLA measurements are taken).

Linkage was a fundamental part of Deer Select, Tapley said. It involves using the same sire over at least two farms in the same year, producing at least 25 progeny to mature hinds. This eliminates the effects of local variations in conditions or hind maturity. The requirement to provide linkage also had a downside because stud breeders were naturally unwilling to share genetics

from their top sires with competitors. "[Linkage] really needs to be done on an industry level where there is a linkage herd somewhere in the country. That's currently possible through the herd at Invermay but we can't expect that to continue forever."

Non-genetic effects have to be noted when recording so these can be accounted for. These include age of dam, date of birth and mob effects (differences in management, feed etc).

There was currently too much emphasis among farmers on the estimated breeding value (eBV) for weight at 12 months (W12), Tapley said, although it does give a good indicator of mature weight. He's concerned that there's not enough understanding among buyers of the significance of the full range of eBVs.

"W12 doesn't tell the whole story. Traits like eye muscle area, reproductive traits and now CARLA are also really important. High CARLA should help with fast autumn growth, because they're not so affected by parasites. Mature weight is important if you're wanting smaller hinds to suit tougher country." Further traits for fertility and health could also be coming online, he noted.

On the velvet side, eBVs were equally important, but Tapley said some venison traits were also relevant to running an efficient velvetting herd. For example, these eBVs could help if you were selecting for a small-framed low growth-rate velvet stag. At the same time, some venison traits were useful if a hind didn't make the grade on the velvet side, but could still be put to a terminal sire to produce meat. If you are running a venison herd as well as a velvet herd you may want to have bigger, more growthy hinds with other venison traits such as EMA (eye muscle area).

If you had eBVs on your herd, you can use Deer Select to find sires that fill certain gaps or to build on some traits, he said. "You must have faith that the eBVs are a true correlation to the facts and make breeding decisions based on this quantifiable data."

He told the group that if you're going to get involved with DNA parentage testing and full recording it's worth doing it properly and being patient, as data accuracy increases over time. Trying to do DNA test just part of a herd would make things too complex. "You'd be running a farm within a farm, so it's best to go all in."

At Peel Forest Estate, a member of Deer Select, they have 2,200 hinds fully recorded, so they also have power in numbers. That power has underpinned Tapley's strong belief that "eBVs truly represent the animal. The more progeny a sire has, and the more time, the more faith you can have in his eBVs."

Tissue samples gave the most comprehensive DNA information and these are taken at tagging time – the tissue sample is assigned electronically using a bar code, but it can also be done manually by writing the visual tag number on the box if the numbers aren't too high.

Tissue sampling and DNA testing is a big investment but yields good benefits. Depending on number of samples processed, parentage testing costs about \$26 to \$32 a pop, plus \$3 for the sampling unit. A straight GBS (genotyping-by-sequencing) profile with no parentage testing is \$27.50.

He said a commercial venison operation probably can't justify DNA parentage testing as long as you have a rough feel for what sires have covered what groups of fawns. "For us at Peel Forest it's important to be sure. Mothering up isn't always accurate."

For a velvet operation he said it was important to identify a maternal contribution to genetic worth: "You can quickly identify any hinds that are no good. If a poor foundation hind stays in the



Peel Forest Estate stud manager Mark Tapley led a constructive workshop.

system too long she could be contributing as many as 15 poor hinds after her female offspring start producing more females. You need to be ruthless, but if a hind produces a line of good progeny and then one dud, don't punish her." He noted one Canterbury farmer had very nearly sent the dam of his top two-year-old stag to the works. "DNA saved the day."

Tapley said building up a good hind base was a long-term investment and when you're DNA testing it's three or four years

before you can start sorting out animals on the basis of progeny performance.

Peel Forest does a lot of embryo transfer work (about 330 a year) to help maximise the genetic contribution of superior hinds. Tapley said anything up to 25 embryos can be flushed from a single hind, but six or seven is more typical. Donor hinds still go the stag after embryos have been taken and about half get in fawn.

Breeding for Peel Forest's milking herd also provided insights into the importance of lactation and mothering ability, Tapley explained. Recipient hinds for the programme are selected only on their mothering ability, and he suggested it could be worth tracking the weaning weights of their fawns to see how big a role that played.

Deer Select eBVs are an important tool for informing potential buyers at sire sales, Tapley said. Peel Forest has just started providing a colour-coded summary that highlights the top performers for a whole range of Deer Select eBVs among the sale offering. "We had one stag that had modest figures but he looked fantastic, so it's important to have both [eBVs and visual appraisal]. With hinds and velvet you can only go on the eBVs."

He said having eBVs available made selection of young stock easier. While they had no progeny of their own on the ground, knowing their parentage and eBVs gave the confidence to make decisions early. "We can also filter out spikers for mating based on a range of traits – weaning weights, velvet weights and so on."

Tapley is enthusiastic about the Gallagher TSi and software they use when monitoring and recording. "Data collection is not too onerous, especially if you are weighing them anyway. It's much cheaper to capture it electronically although some people are still doing it manually." He said it was vital to back up data, for example on a separate data stick. However Gallagher was soon to transfer to a cloud-based system, which gives greater confidence in data security and makes it easier to let go of reliance on manual records. ■

Conference: continued

First Light group managing director Gerard Hickey said its 2020 supply contracts have been well accepted, which he put down to the company standing by its contracted suppliers through Covid.

"The European foodservice market remains a challenge due to restaurants not being fully open. However, there is a window of opportunity between now and late October for the chilled market," he said. "We are encouraging our suppliers to supply as many deer as possible during this period when returns have greater certainty."

Meanwhile, Hickey reported, First Light sales are growing well at retail in New Zealand, the United States and United Kingdom.

"First Light has a significant investment in an 'on the ground' sales force in these markets, which is paying dividends in this uncertain time," he said. ■



Here in New Zealand, Silver Fern Farms recently partnered with Gourmet Direct, a nationwide online store specialising in premium New Zealand meat products, to deliver its Silver Fern Farms full grass-fed retail range right to doorsteps (including rural addresses) through the online store. The winter retail promotion gives consumers the chance to win one of 100 Le Creuset Cast Iron Signature Casseroles when they purchase any Silver Fern Farms retail pack.

Genetic power starts to show in BV proof programme

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The data is still raw, but already the impact of superior genetic merit for growth in commercial farming conditions is starting to show through in a Deer Select “BV proof” on-farm trial.

THE WORK IS being carried out on three farms, two with red deer and one elk/wapiti. On each property, two sires, each with known estimated breeding values (eBVs) for growth, were used over some of the farm’s commercial venison hinds in 2019. The two sires on each farm were about 10kg apart for the weight at 12 months (W12) eBV.

The aim was to record the differences in growth of progeny of the different sires under typical farm conditions. Age groups of hinds and birth date ranges were similar and no corrections for birth date were made, which is typical of a commercial farm. Weaners have been grazed together and are getting the same feed and animal health treatments. Because some sires had more male progeny, the data has been evened up between male and female progeny so growth rate comparisons are more meaningful.

Each farm got a decent number of fawns on the ground from each sire. The progeny have so far been weighed at least twice from weaning onwards and genetic merit of the sires already seems to be making its mark.

John and Tash Hamilton (elk/wapiti, Winton)

Fifty-six progeny evenly split between two Tikana sires were weighed on 3 March and 29 May. The female progeny of the higher-merit sire were 2.1kg heavier than those from the medium-merit sire by the second weighing. For the males, the difference

was 6.34kg. Weighted for sex, the overall growth advantage for the period of just under 3 months was 4.22kg for the higher-merit progeny (blue line on graph below left).

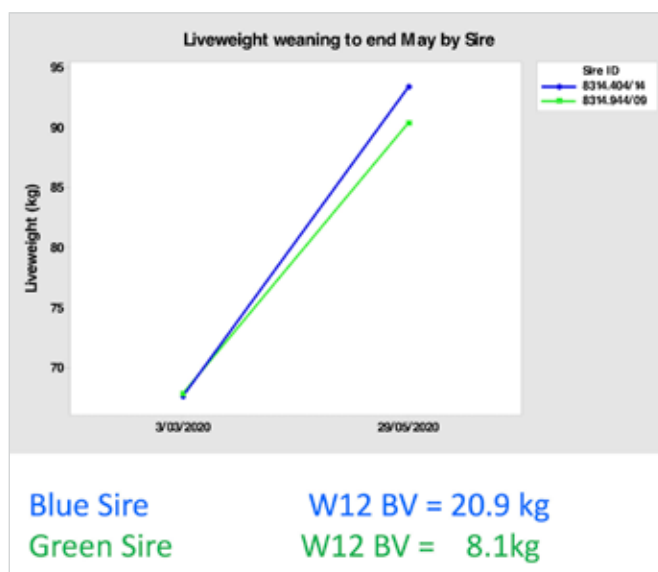
Translated to carcass weight, that growth advantage, calculated at \$7/kg, already translated to \$16 per animal by the end of May.

Lorna and Duncan Humm (red, Mt Somers)

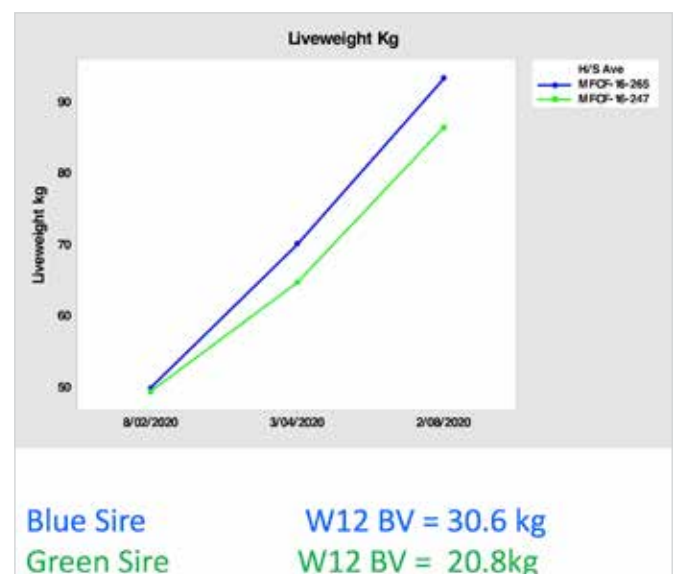
Just over 100 progeny from medium and high-merit Melior Genetics sires were produced. They were weighed on 2 February, 4 April and 2 August. For the first two-month period the high-merit progeny (male and female combined) were an average 5.4 kg heavier than the medium-merit progeny. By 2 August the liveweight difference had grown to 6.9kg.

Lorna Humm told *Deer Industry News* that the high-BV progeny had really streaked ahead since April and also noted they are nice to handle. She said the best animals had been gaining 300–350g/day right through winter. A faecal egg count test had shown the young stock were carrying a moderate worm burden, but were showing good growth nonetheless. The animals are on a multi-species sward which “they love”.

So far, the liveweight advantage of the higher-BV progeny translates to a carcass weight margin of \$26 per head, based on a \$7 schedule.



Progeny of the higher-BV sire at the Hamiltons were starting to open up a lead, despite starting at a similar weaning weight.



Progeny of the higher-BV sire have grown consistently faster at the Humms’ property.

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Advance Parties: Welcome to all deer farmers

by Pania Flint, Advance Party Coordinator and Innes Moffat, DINZ CEO

Advance Parties (APs) have become a significant part of the fabric of New Zealand's deer farming industry over the past five or more years. Currently about one in five deer farmers belongs to an AP and the benefits of belonging have spread well outside the boundaries of these groups through DFA branches, regional and technical workshops, conferences, publications, the internet and good old fashioned word of mouth.

IT'S TIMELY TO remind ourselves what APs do for our industry. They:

- provide a support network for sharing ideas and concerns, while boosting morale, helping members both manage challenges and realise opportunities
- give groups direct access to subject matter experts, DINZ staff, marketing managers and other farmers who they normally wouldn't be able to meet on an individual basis
- provide a framework for collecting information, recording changes and outcomes
- stimulate members to look at their own operation and challenge their own thinking, being held to account by other members, and likewise holding them to account in a supportive way

- provide the people, skills and properties to showcase good practices to other deer farmers and the wider community. Advance Parties are open to all deer farmers. DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries are funding APs to help improve farmers' management of deer in the changing environment we find ourselves. "We take a very flexible approach to running APs," says DINZ CEO Innes Moffat.

"We follow a 'farmer-first' approach and aren't prescriptive about the topics APs pursue, or about the form they take. But we do expect that actions will be taken, and results of those actions observed by the members.

"We think the AP model is especially good at allowing farmers to help each other with some of the rule changes coming our way. APs provide groups with a structured way of addressing some

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DNA proofs: continued



Progeny enjoying a multi-species pasture on the farm of Lorna and Duncan Humm.

David and Ali Seifert (red, Raetihi)

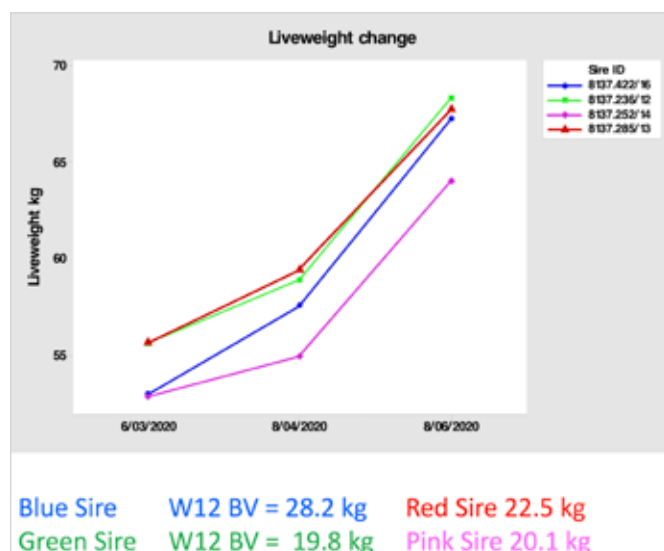
The situation in this herd is a little more complex because progeny from four Ruapehu Red Deer sires were available. Three are of medium-high merit for growth with one higher-merit sire. The high-merit sire was mated to younger hinds.

The progeny from the high-merit sire were 2kg lighter than the other groups at weaning in early March, but by their third weighing in June were catching up to the other groups and showed the biggest weight gains over the two weight periods to the start of June.

The high-merit sire on this farm (the blue line on the graph at right) has the strongest eBVs for spring growth, so his progeny

may start to pull ahead at this point. They have already shown the biggest weight gains for the two weighing periods recorded.

The important point for all of these farms is that we are seeing the impact of higher eBVs in real commercial situations. ■



Coming through! The highest-merit sire on the Seiferts' farm (blue line) was mated to younger hinds and weaning weights were lower than for two of the other groups. However, the progeny are catching up and have BVs for fast spring growth, so may pull ahead soon.

Advance Parties: continued

of the daunting challenges like freshwater regulation, and the improvement to deer sheds made necessary by the Regulated Control Scheme. They work because they provide a facilitator to help farmers identify a starting point and then plenty of support to encourage people to follow through with changes.”

APs have looked at grass-grub, weaner finishing systems, health plans and finances to name a few. The list of topics that AP members have reviewed is extensive and is agreed by members. Some have chosen to collect and benchmark data, but most APs focus less on data and more on sharing both positive and negative experiences.

Because some of the APs have been running for a few years now, they meet less often than before. A couple are meeting three or four times a year, which suits the members’ needs. They come together to work on specific topics, making the most of the day off-farm. Other groups choose to keep meeting monthly, which is great because they enjoy seeing the changes that have been made on properties over the previous couple of years.

DINZ funding for APs and their close cousins, the Deer Industry Environment Groups, will continue past the end of the current Primary Growth Partnership. Funding levels will have to be adjusted, however. DINZ will be working with current and future APs on how this adjustment might occur. In the meantime, DINZ remains very keen to extend the benefits of belonging to a deer industry group to new members.

APs are for any farmer who is willing to learn, take part and make changes that contribute to a sustainable and profitable deer farming community on their own and other farms.

Our newest group consists mostly of farmers who have been farming deer for less than a year or two. Other groups have farmers who have been running deer for decades and still believe they have things to learn.

- **Contact Phil McKenzie at DINZ on 0274 997 809 if you would like to discuss how to join an AP, or if you have a small group ready to go.**



Advance Parties are much more than a discussion group, with opportunities for across-AP discussion such as this tour by Hawke’s Bay deer farmers of the Mackenzie country

Medium-term issues and opportunities facing AP members

AP chairs, facilitators and some members had virtual meetings while under lock-down to share how their groups were going – and to discuss the common challenges across the regions. Seventy people participated in three facilitated on-line workshops. This gave attendees a good opportunity to learn how groups worked – and share some war stories about operating under Covid. The common themes that emerged from these sessions were:

Markets

- **Issues:** Market stability, uncertainty, effects of global pandemic and reliance on food service sector; stock trading issues.
- **Opportunities:** Market development, domestic trade, getting better at selling our story, promoting New Zealand as safe and environmentally responsible with high welfare standards and healthy food. Develop better relationships between breeders, finishers, processors and markets.

Drought and feed shortages

- **Issues:** Works capacity, killing space in face of Covid-19 and drought.
- **Opportunities:** Develop more resilience into farm systems to manage impacts of climate extremes.

Environmental regulations

- **Issues:** Changing rules and uncertainty, increasing compliance costs and paperwork, caps on intensification and stock numbers.
- **Opportunities:** Showcase the good work the industry has done and provide science that demonstrates sustainable farming practices.

People

- **Issues:** Farm succession and declining interest in farming deer; farmers’ mental wellbeing.
- **Opportunities:** Finding and retaining good staff who want to work with deer; attract investment in deer farming by other drystock farmers; support social networks, such as APs where farmers can share their issues with like-minded people.

Productivity

- **Issues:** Productivity increases in the industry have been modest, despite better genetics and improved knowledge of deer management and health.
- **Opportunities:** Increase the efficiency of deer production without increasing environmental impacts (including the effects of adverse weather). These are in the areas of genetics, feeding and forage systems, animal health and reproduction. Investigate improved genetics for meat production, parasite resistance, calving date and temperament. ■

Tech webinar: Still plenty of scope for velvet sector

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

There was a lot for velvet producers to smile about when they tuned in for the first of three Farmer Tech Webinars on 21 July. They heard that we have about the same number of velvet stags on the ground now as we did in 1996 – about 165,000. But thanks to genetic improvements, better nutrition and breeding technology, today's crop is producing about 40 percent more velvet than their recent ancestors.

THAT'S TRANSLATED TO an average weight of 5.1kg today, and a farmgate value to velvet producers topping \$100m for the first time last year – up from \$28 million as recently as 2014.

Encouraging figures from the webinar like these were drawn from a paper co-written by David Stevens, AgResearch senior scientist, farm systems and environment, that was first presented at the World Veterinary Congress. He was joined in the one-hour session by co-authors Rhys Griffiths and Tony Pearse of DINZ, who focused on the marketing and on-farm angles. Vet Lorna Humm moderated.



One of the most encouraging trends discussed was the uncoupling since about 2010 of velvet volumes and prices, so that increases in volume no longer automatically trigger a significant drop in prices.

Velvet exports when they started in the mid-1970s were into an undifferentiated commodity market with its unpredictable price swings, but as early as the 1990s the industry was already taking

steps towards more stability and away from the commodity trade through research. Velvet was still treated as a commodity in the market until around 2010, when the industry implemented its branded ingredient strategy to the Korean health food sector.

The establishment of VARNZ (Velvet Antler Research NZ, a partnership between the Game Industry Board and AgResearch based out of Invermay) in 1994 (now part of the new co-innovation research model) was the first stage of putting some science behind the multiple health benefits of velvet antler – immune function, anti-ageing, anti-fatigue, joint function, cardiovascular health and so on. Stevens urged producers to share their ideas for future velvet research priorities.

A key development was partnering with companies in the healthy food sector who now promote the provenance and quality of New Zealand velvet in their premium products. The Korea Ginseng Corporation (KGC), for example, launched its 20th product incorporating velvet at the NZ Korea Free Trade Agreement signing and has reported significant success in sales, targeting a premium market.

Positive developments throughout the production chain have helped propel velvet from 10 percent of the deer industry's farmgate value a few years ago to 40 percent today. Stevens said the strong heritability of antler characteristics (between 0.42–0.45) had seen weights of red antler entered in the velvet nationals grow by an average 0.25kg/year from 1982 to 2017. For elk supreme the gain was 0.4kg a year on average.

Pearse and Stevens stressed that a better understanding of nutrition requirements has underpinned this extraordinary genetic improvement. The three crucial periods highlighted included the period of initial pedicle development for young stags (high protein required), the post-rut period following the roar

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Velvet tech seminar: continued



Velvet production and prices 1995–2020.

when condition needs to be regained quickly before winter (high energy requirement), and in the 3 weeks leading up to button drop (both additional energy and protein needed).

In fact the good start in life for velvet stags goes right back to conditions when they were in utero, as well as the lactational ability of their dams. Pearse said this can also influence how a stag with good genetics performs later as a velvet producer. He said husbandry practices, such as keeping stags in settled social groups mostly based around age, especially for the 1–2 and 3 year olds, also played a big role in capturing genetic potential.

The speakers agreed that a lot else has gone right for the velvet industry so far, to get it where it is today. These included the following:

Regulatory regime

The model for responsibility to maintain welfare standards being shared by deer farmers and veterinarians with the close cooperation of MPI has endured well for the past 27 years, through the National Velvetting Standards Body (NVSB). More recent developments including the Regulated Control Scheme (RCS) show how the industry is prepared to adapt and improve as expectations and standards increase.

Market access

The 2008 New Zealand–China Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and the 2015 New Zealand–Korea FTA have each played a pivotal role in securing New Zealand enhanced access to those key markets. Griffiths explained the Korea FTA gave New Zealand an edge over competitors from China, Canada, Russia and Australia. He said a negotiated reduction of the tariff on dried whole stick velvet over time suited New Zealand producers, while still allowing Korean regulators to achieve their goal of some protection for Korean velvet growers' frozen product.

Panel chat

The floor was opened to the webinar viewers to question the panel.

Should we be selecting to promote certain minerals and compounds in velvet?

Stevens confirmed this is an area of interest, but more work

is needed on what influences nutrient loadings. Griffiths said that in the healthy food sector there was increasing demand for certain compounds in powdered velvet and more research generally on immune function.

In terms of deer physiology Stevens is interested in calcium and phosphorus changes in stags during velvet growth, and the role of other minerals such as zinc, copper and possibly manganese in quality and robustness.

Will there be more regulatory changes affecting velvet?

Pearse said more attention to welfare issues was likely – velvet removal and recovery for example. He said the NVSB is robust, but there is always room for further development. Griffiths said the

RCS may have been painful to implement but it, along with the new VelTrak traceability system, would set us up well with a marketing advantage.

When feed is short, when are the best times to get a return on feed investment?

Stevens reiterated that growing out young stags well with a high protein diet sets them up for life and means they are better able to tolerate tough conditions later on.

Are we reaching the limits of genetic potential for velvet?

Stevens said it's important to balance the traits needed in the national velvet herd. "We need a resilient population of deer." Pearse said maternal traits merited greater attention.

There is a difference between the short, clean tidy velvet that's requested and what's produced. What's the right balance?

Griffiths noted that the more that velvet is grown out to achieve greater weights and returns, the greater the loss of the 'jelly tips' (the very top couple of millimetres). "Once velvet tips start to palmate and dimple we lose that value in the tips, which can be worth up to US\$2,000–\$3,000 per kilo (dried)." There was no easy answer to finding the perfect balance between grade and weights, and he suggested there need to be stronger commercial signals to encourage a focus on top grades if that's what markets want.

What is VelTrak?

The new velvet tagging and tracing system will be fully implemented with readable UHF chips in the wristband-type tags in 2021/22. See *Deer Industry News* June/July 2020, page 16 for more.

Summary

Griffiths said the velvet industry has done well taking on board the requirements of the RCS. "We'll always have speed bumps and there's a way to go still, but deer farmers have shown a willingness to change and adapt."

Pearse concluded that the velvet sector is "an amazing industry based on an amazing animal". He said we should return the favour to deer by looking after them well and developing resilient production and quality systems. ■

- Further information: velvet.org.nz

Tech webinar: Deer repro and DeerPRO explained

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Sometimes there's not much separating triumph and disaster when it comes to reproductive success in deer herds. And once those young stock are on the ground and going through the venison production system the data that's freely available to farmers can give some valuable insights into their herd's productivity.

FARMERS TUNING IN for the second of three Passion2Profit Tech Webinars on 28 July got a great short and sharp refresher course in both of these areas from two of the best in the business.

Reproductive performance

The die for 2020 fawning has been cast, but there is still plenty to be done to protect those that do drop in a few weeks' time, while also giving next year's breeding season the best shot at success. Recently-retired scientist **Geoff Asher** shared his encyclopaedic knowledge of all things repro with a typically pithy and on-point presentation.

He said if your mixed age red hinds are achieving 94–95 percent (per 100 hinds mated) survival to weaning and the R2s get 92–93 percent, that puts you in the top 5–10 percent of producers. There are six main areas where reproductive failure or wastage occurs, he said, and no two farms are the same in how it happens. They are:

- poor conception in R2 hinds (e.g. less than 70 percent)
- poor conception in adult hinds (e.g. less than 85 percent)
- late conception
- fetal loss
- peri-natal loss
- low fawn growth rates (a function of hind performance).

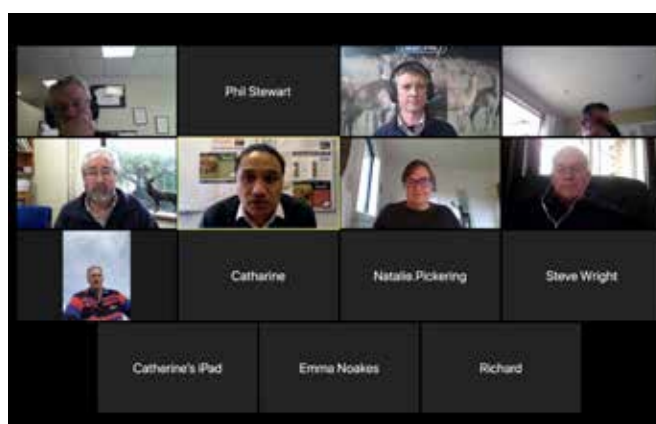
There are plenty of monitoring tools available to track the precursors of reproductive success and give early warning when interventions are needed, Asher said. These include:

- regular liveweight measurements, especially for growing hinds as they approach puberty (Advance Parties have done a good job promoting this)
- body condition scoring for adult hinds (not useful for R2s)
- ultrasonography for fetal ageing and pregnancy diagnosis (deer farmers use this more than other livestock sectors)
- DNA testing to identify parentage and also good or poor-performing hinds.

Puberty

Poor reproductive performance in R2 hinds is a common issue in New Zealand. It is highly variable and has multiple causes, but Asher said failure to reach puberty because of poor growth is the most common factor.

A hind's achieving puberty by about 16 months is mediated by photoperiod during her second autumn, but liveweight is also a big



An advertisement for Farm Mapping Drone Services. The top half shows a drone flying over a landscape at sunset. The text reads: "FARM MAPPING DRONE SERVICES". Below this, a list of services: "High Resolution Property Maps • 3D Property Models • Precision Plant Health Analysis • Precision Maps for Farm Environment Plans •". A tagline follows: "In a data driven world, improving yield and on-farm efficiency has never been easier." At the bottom, it says "Call us for a no-obligation quote today." and provides contact information: "hello@ininitumstudios.com" and "027 505 8125". The Ininitum Studios logo is in the bottom right corner, and the CAA logo is in the bottom left corner.

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Reproduction and DeerPro: continued

factor. Poorly fed young hinds can delay puberty by another year or two if they're not well grown enough. (In the harsh environment of Scotland's Rhum Island, hinds don't hit puberty until they are 3–4 years old.)

The days of the 90kg mature hind are long gone, Asher said. For the much bigger Eastern red deer you now need a liveweight in the high 90s or low 100s to get a successful R2 pregnancy.

"For success with R2s, plan to achieve liveweights of at least 90 percent of the expected mature weight." He added that some who invest in high-growth genetics don't always appreciate that they now need to grow their R2s on to heavier weights to reach that 90 percent and get them to puberty on time.

- Everything you need to know about growing replacement hinds is at: www.deernz.org/deer-hub/tools/feeding/replacement-hind-growth-curves

Body condition score (BCS)

This is useful for monitoring, but only for mature hinds. Asher said a herd of mature hinds with an average BCS of <2.0 would likely suffer catastrophic reproductive failure. Anything over a BCS of 2.0 might conceive, but it will be late. On average, a hind with BCS of 4.0 will conceive 12 days earlier than a hind with a 2.5 BCS.

"It is possible to rescue a bad situation with body condition," Asher said. "BCS can be lifted by as much as 1.0 in just two weeks. Weaning makes this easier. Feed quality plays a big part in this. If you can improve it, you can flick the switch."

Asher said that if feed is good and hinds are in good condition, you shouldn't feel compelled to pre-rut wean.

Gestation length can be a real fly in the ointment, he warned. "All your good work achieving high and early conception rates can unravel if the hind is poorly fed later in her gestation. With deer there can be a variation of up to 20 days, so keep them fed well and don't waste all that effort." Asher added that for some systems, such as high country situations with a later season, there's no special advantage in bringing forward conception and fawning dates.

Fetal wastage

Because deer are generally left to themselves during pregnancy, any fetal wastage is hard to detect, but Asher said abortion losses are low – less than 2 percent across the national herd. That said, high abortion losses can occur in some herds. The causes aren't well understood. Toxoplasmosis is the only disease known to cause abortions but poor nutrition in pregnancy – especially a lack of protein – is another possible cause.

"If in doubt, double scan and adjust your management to reduce stress on the hinds. But my main message about this is: don't panic."

Peri-natal losses

In contrast to fetal wastage, peri-natal losses tend to be under-reported and under-estimated, Asher said. "I've been saying this for 40 years."

Peri-natal deaths are hard to spot because new fawns are usually hidden anyway. Asher said the main three causes of peri-natal deaths are starvation/dehydration (usually because of abandonment), dystocia or misadventure. A common element to all causes is stress, often caused if stocking rates are too high, the

environment isn't suitable (e.g. no elevation or cover) or there is too much human disturbance.

"At Invermay the stocking rates are dropped from 12 stock units/hectare to six or seven for fawning. With the AI herd it's even less because they are all fawning at once so there's more competition for space."

Making fences fawn proof was a good investment, he added.

Fawn growth rates

Feeding hinds well throughout lactation has a double benefit, Asher said. Not only will the fawn grow well and achieve good weaning weights, but also the hind will be going into the next mating with a good BCS and high chance of conceiving early.

"You can dig yourself out of a hole feeding hinds well going into mating, but it's better not to get into the hole in the first place."

DeerPRO – a mine of information

With nearly 5 million animal records in the system, the DeerPRO database has become a powerful information resource, both at industry level and also for individual farms.

DeerPRO manager **Solis Norton** said there was little information on Johnes disease (JD) in deer when it first emerged here 40 years ago, but it was clear the impact was worse than in other stock classes. It has never been successfully eradicated overseas and Norton said the costs of eradication would likely far outweigh the benefits.

The system was set up as Johnes Management Limited (now DeerPRO) to help identify JD issues on individual farms by monitoring for lesions at processing plants, and help people get on top of the disease through testing, culling and management changes.

Today, DeerPRO provides productivity reports for more than 550 farms, accounting for 80 percent of national venison production. Norton said the biggest benefits are seen at individual farmer and vet level, but the aggregated data also gives plenty of useful information. For example, individuals can see how they are performing in terms of carcass weights and growth rates against local or regional benchmarks.

He told the webinar that there has been a general decline in the incidence of JD lesions detected over the past few seasons, although regional hotspots still occur. Interestingly the difference in carcass weights between animals with and without JD lesions has also gradually declined. The gap is now only 1–2kg on average, but that still represents a cost to producers.

Norton said this might show that the disease is now being better managed, or that the original epidemic is now in retreat. While the disease might be quietening for now, he said the monitoring through DeerPRO continues to provide excellent productivity information, with plans to broaden the reporting to include monitoring of non-JD issues, such as liver lesions. There will also now be a chilled season update report as well as the end-of-season report already received.

He said there is also a prospect of working more closely with OSPRI by sharing lesion information that might signal a Tb issue on certain farms. "We'll be working to ensure privacy is still protected and that our stakeholders are on board with this." ■

- **The third Tech Webinar, on environmental stewardship, will be covered in our October/November issue.**

Winter grazing audit guidelines for Canterbury

The DINZ Environmental Stewardship Reference Group had input into new Farm Environment Plan auditor guidelines for winter grazing issued by Environment Canterbury. The guidelines contain many references to deer and advise auditors on the significance of their behaviours.

SENIOR SERVICE MANAGER Nick Daniels said the guidelines, which can be downloaded from <https://bit.ly/2B03v6f>, are an important step towards better managing the impact of winter grazing on water quality, soil health and mahinga kai values.

“Winter is a demanding time for farmers. That is why having a plan for grazing in bad weather is even more important. The new guidelines, which have been put together in conjunction with industry, including DairyNZ, Beef+Lamb NZ, Deer Industry NZ and Foundation for Arable Research, lay out our expectations for farmers to understand the risks and make plans to mitigate these.”

All Canterbury farms that require a land-use consent to farm need to prepare and implement an FEP which is regularly audited to manage environmental risks. As part of their FEP, farmers need to plan how they are carrying out intensive winter grazing to ensure they can meet requirements throughout the season.

“Having the new shared guidelines, with examples and practical solutions for auditors to work through with the farmers, will improve consistency and also highlight the benefits of having

a winter grazing plan in your FEP,” Daniels said.

The guidelines include expectations on planning throughout the farming calendar year for:

- paddock selection (winter/early spring)
- block set-up (early summer/pre-grazing)
- crop grazing (April to August)
- post-grazing management (August to October and beyond).

ECan’s rules require Good Management Practice on winter grazing to be implemented on all farms, including having vegetative buffers between any winter grazing and waterways. Buffers around critical source areas, as well as paddock selection, strategic grazing, and post-grazing paddock management all need to be carefully considered and planned for.

The Land and Water Regional Plan puts limits around discharges of sediment and contaminants to waterways, strict restrictions on stock access to rivers, lakes, wetlands and drains, and contains consent to farm requirements regulating winter grazing. ■



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Progeny research recognised

AgResearch has recognised the value of its deer science team's work on the Deer Progeny Test (DPT), awarding the group its internal Impact Prize, one of two significant in-house awards made each year.

IT ACKNOWLEDGES THAT the DPT was supported by a very well-articulated impact assessment case and was deemed by the judging panel to be “an outstanding example of AgResearch Science truly impacting on an industry sector”.

The prize is much more than a pat on the back for a worthwhile research programme. AgResearch farm systems scientist Jamie Ward explains that the award comes with an additional \$200,000 of AgResearch funding which the project team plan to spend on deer-related work during the current (2020/21) financial year.

“The funding is unencumbered, which gives us more freedom as to where we apply it,” Ward says. He’s currently finalising a programme proposal to utilise the funds.

While he can’t say too much about the planned work just yet, he confirms it will build on the discoveries and outcomes from the DPT. That programme, set up in 2011, aimed to achieve via Deer Select greater farm productivity and profitability by improving the quality, availability and visibility of relevant production genetics within the New Zealand deer industry.

He says the planned work will retain that strong focus on farm productivity and aimed to produce new knowledge giving the

industry increasing resilience, sustainability and more flexibility on how it meets its customers’ demands.

Ward says the prize acknowledges the input of a big group of present and former (*) AgResearch staff, including himself, Sheryl-Anne Newman, Bryan Thompson, Mary Wheeler, Karren O’Neill, Geoff Asher, Ian Scott*, Helen Manly*, Julie Everett-Hincks*, Jason Archer* and Rachel Worth*.

While it recognises AgResearch staff, Ward said the programme wouldn’t have been possible without the support of leaders, partners, stakeholders and people in the deer industry who helped provide a platform for the research to happen. This applied especially to Paddy and Barb Boyd at Haldon Station, Ross and Sally Stevens at Whiterock Station, and Alliance Group.

DINZ science policy manager Catharine Sayer says the prize was well deserved. “The positive impact of the DPT on the industry will be felt for years and all of us at DINZ are delighted that the deer team’s work has been acknowledged this way.” ■

- We hope to bring you more detail on the planned research in our next issue.

See ya Geoff!

There was a big line-up of colleagues past and present to wish scientist Geoff Asher all the best for his impending retirement. Using the technology that’s defining 2020, they shared their good wishes with Geoff online, with plenty of references to Geoff’s love of fossil hunting, his quirky sense of humour as well as his dedication to science. Highlights from Geoff’s farewell included:

“YOU’VE PLAYED AN enormous part in the development of the New Zealand deer industry – and since there has been no Deer Industry Award made this year, you will get to wear that crown for two years! We look forward to continuing to work with you in whatever form that might take.”

– Innes Moffat, DINZ CEO

“You are the father of farmed deer research. Well done for choosing deer [to research] rather than rocks. You’ve integrated all the aspects of deer production and processing so well. Working with you has been an education and fun. You command absolute respect from all of us at DINZ and from farmers and processors.”

– Catharine Sayer, DINZ science and policy manager

“You’ve created a fantastic body of work. It was great working with you during my time at DINZ.”

– Mark O’Connor, former DINZ CEO

“Congratulations on 40 years of outstanding contributions. One great adventure was driving all the way from Dunedin to Kaipara to pick up some Mesopotamian fallow to bring back to Invermay

– that really cemented our friendship. And I can think of no better person than you to have received the Deer Industry Award last year.”

– Tony Pearse, DINZ producer manager

“You’re a giant in the field of deer research. I’m sorry I never got the chance to come and hunt some fallow with you, but it was always a pleasure to work with you.”

– Dan Coup, former DINZ CEO

“I’ve always like following your research because it has such a practical bent, and we’ve always really enjoyed having you up here in Hawke’s Bay. The feedback from farmers we’ve had [on your



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Venison osso bucco

by Chef Michael Coughlin

Slow braised in apple juice with shallots and steamed kumara with lemon, parsley and caper butter. Preparation: 30 mins • Time to cook: 4 hours

THIS IS A truly unforgettable, rich and comforting meal that will satisfy everything from the most hearty of appetites to the most refined and discerning palates. The key to a successful dish here is patience. A long slow cooking process will allow the prominent connective tissue to dissolve and create that lip-smacking sauce that makes you want to sink back in your chair and slowly savour.

Ingredients

Venison

- 6 x 150g farm-raised venison osso bucco
- Salt & pepper to season
- 50ml olive oil
- 700ml beef or venison stock
- 700ml apple juice
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 cups shallots, peeled

Kumara

- 600g kumara, peeled and cut into 1 inch cubes
- 2 lemons, juice and micro plane zest
- ¼ cup flat leaf parsley, chopped
- 100g salted butter
- 30g baby capers, rinsed and chopped
- Few grinds pepper
- Water cress to garnish

Osso bucco

Season the osso bucco with salt and pepper and brown in a preheated frying pan with some olive oil until caramelised all over.

Remove the venison to a plate and in the same pan brown off the shallots for 3–4 minutes, then set aside.

Pour off any residual oil, place the pan back on the heat and deglaze with the apple juice. Place the browned venison back into the pan along with the meat stock and herbs. Put a tight-fitting lid onto the pan and put into a preheated 120°C oven. Cook slowly for 4 hours. Lift the lid, pour in the shallots and allow to cook for a further 30mins or until the meat voluntarily falls away from the bone.

Remove the osso bucco and the shallots carefully from the pan and keep hot. Put the pan of braising juices on a high heat on the stove top and reduce until they become rich and glossy. At this point add the meat and shallots back to the pan and glaze the meat; reserve in a hot place until ready to serve.

Kumara

Put kumara cubes into a steamer, sprinkle with a little salt and steam until tender and the kumara slips off the tip of a paring knife when checked.

In a separate pot gently melt the butter, add the lemon juice and zest, capers and parsley along with a few grinds of pepper, toss the kumara into the butter mix and serve immediately.

To serve

Spoon the osso bucco into serving bowls with the shallots and plenty of the braising juices, garnish with the cubes of kumara, place some picked watercress on top and serve. ■



Geoff farewell: continued

visits] has always been outstanding. They tell me they could listen to you all day and they especially like that you swear just like they do!”

– Richard Hilson, Director Vet Services (HB) and Advance Party facilitator

“I’ve enjoyed that you’re not only a rock nutter but also love talking about trees.”

– Lindsay Fung, DINZ environmental stewardship manager

“It’s been awesome to know you and congratulations on your 40 years with the industry!”

– Rhys Griffiths, DINZ manager, markets

“I have great memories of my association with you, especially in the early days at Invermay. That place is alive, vibrant and

welcoming. As an industry, we owe so much to you. Thanks for all your support when you backed me up pushing for welfare standards for deer.”

– John Tacon, DINZ quality assurance manager

“It’s been a pleasure working with Geoff, during my time writing stuff for the deer industry. He has a knack of explaining tricky science in terms that farmers, and even journalists, can take on board. He shows patience and good humour, not holding back from telling people if they’ve got it wrong, but is also willing to accept new findings that might challenge long-held views – all in the best traditions of science. Haere ra, Geoff. You’ve set the bar high.”

– Phil Stewart, editor, Deer Industry News ■

Freshwater rules are now law

The government's freshwater policy reforms are now law. Our hope now as an industry is that the health of waterways, rather than arbitrary rules, will drive the way councils enforce the regulations.

THE NATIONAL POLICY Statement on Freshwater Management (NPS-FM), National Environmental Standards for Freshwater (NES-FW), stock exclusion regulations, and regulations in the measurement and reporting of water takes will in time affect all deer farmers.

"We appreciate the fact that the Government has refined some of its Essential Freshwater proposals in response to feedback from farmers and others," says DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat.

"However there are requirements within the regulations which, if they are applied in all situations as they are worded, will be extremely costly for many farmers and achieve little environmental benefit.

"We are particularly concerned about deer farmers who run low-intensity operations with a very low environmental impact. Any new policies and rules applying to them need to achieve the goal of water quality improvement at least cost and with minimum bureaucracy, while reflecting the minimal risk these operations pose to water quality."

Moffat says expecting these farmers to comply, for example, with the same stock exclusion rules as an intensive finishing farm just because both farms are on the flat, would be a waste of time and money. He says it would be far better to focus on actions that will give the biggest water quality benefits, at least cost.

"Having met recently with the Minister of Agriculture, Damien O'Connor, we are hopeful that the Government recognises our good faith and commitment to improved water quality."

Moffat says the deer farmers can be proud of the commitment they have made to good environmental management over many years. This was reflected in a recent biennial Survey of Rural Decision Makers, run by scientists at Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research. This showed that more deer farmers have active environmental plans than any other category of farmer.

"We are also into year 3 of a 5-year study into the impact of deer on water quality in hill and high country grazing situations, so we will have good data to further refine decision-making.

"So when we say that the deer industry is willing to play its part along with all New Zealanders in improving freshwater quality, these are not empty words. We do so in the knowledge of the very big investment our farmers have been making over many years.

"And we will continue to support our farmers to develop and action their farm plans, identify major environmental risks and adopt the most appropriate mitigations for their particular circumstances."

What do the new regulations do?

- controls on winter grazing and feedlots
- requirement for farmers to have enforceable farm environment plans
- stricter controls on nitrogen pollution
- new bottom lines for other measures of waterway health
- higher health standards at swimming spots in rivers
- requirement for councils to clean up urban streams.

When do they take effect?

Some of the new rules will take immediate effect (**from 3 September**), while there is a longer timeframe for others. The gazette notice is here:

www.gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2020-go3443

Where can I learn more about impacts on drystock farming?

www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/fresh-water/action-healthy-waterways-information-sheep-beef-and-deer-farmers ■

DINZ contributes scholarships to College of Korean Medicine

DEER INDUSTRY NEW ZEALAND awarded New Zealand Deer Velvet Scholarships to Won Young Park and Jae Kyoung Lee at an award ceremony held at the Dean's office of the College of Korean Medicine on 23 July.

New Zealand Ambassador to Korea, Philip Turner, came to present the scholarship certificates to the students and discussed the ways of working together. Each scholarship was valued at 2m Korean Won (about \$NZ2,500).



From left, Ambassador Philip Turner of New Zealand, Won Young Park (15th class of Oriental Medicine College), Jae Kyoung Lee (17th class of Oriental Medicine College), and Jae-Dong Lee, Dean of Oriental Medicine College.

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Helicopter legend passes away



Bill was honoured with a helicopter flypast.

LEGENDARY HELICOPTER PILOT Bill Black passed away on 1 July, aged 76. He was farewelled in Te Anau on 10 July where the occasion was marked by a seven-helicopter flypast, with search and rescue personnel, firefighters and aviation club members forming a guard of honour, before he was flown in an Alpine Helicopters craft to the Te Anau cemetery.

About 900 people attended the funeral, with hundreds more following a livestream.

Bill, who was awarded an MBE for his service, was known especially for his decades of search and rescue work (he completed more than 500 missions) and service as a volunteer firefighter in Te Anau. He also had a strong connection with the deer industry through his early work in venison recovery.

Sir Tim Wallis, who was one of Bill's employers and attended the funeral, was quoted in *Stuff* paying tribute to Bill's "impeccable" flying record. Sir Tim said Bill had been an early pioneer of live deer capture at Nokomai Station and in parts of Fiordland.

Bill had suffered poor health in recent years had had to stop flying as a career after heart surgery in 2004.

The deer industry extends its condolences to Bill's wife Shirley and their family. ■

Velvet scholarship: continued

Dean Jae-Dong Lee of Korean Medicine College expressed his gratitude for the scholarships. He added that Kyung Hee University has been leading the traditional medicine in Korea but will try to introduce the excellence of Korean medicine to the world.

"It was an honor to meet the New Zealand Ambassador and to receive a scholarship, said Jae Kyoung Lee. "I will try my best to contribute to the development of Korean medicine." ■

Murray Powell recognised at special ceremony

Hamilton's "father of the deer industry" Murray Powell, co-founder of Hamilton Zoo with his late wife Gloria, was presented with his medal for Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (NZOM) for services to wildlife conservation and the deer industry on at a special ceremony on 31 July.

AS REPORTED IN our June/July 2020 issue, Murray and Gloria established the Hilldale Game Farm in 1966, which later became Hilldale Zoo and Wildlife Park and then Hamilton Zoo.

Hamilton Zoo is now one of the city's leading attractions with more than 140,000 visitors a year, as well as running successful breeding programmes and conservation and research projects for both nationally and internationally endangered species. Murray also founded the Waikato branch of NZDFA.

The presentation was made by Hamilton Mayor, Paula Southgate, who paid tribute to Murray's special contribution to Hamilton.

"Murray, you have earned a unique place in the heart of this city and in the heart of all Hamiltonians. You leave a long-lasting legacy that thousands of Hamiltonians today and into the future will enjoy," she said.

More than 70 of Mr Powell's family and friends attended the ceremony, with daughter Sharon watching via livestream from Adelaide. DINZ producer manager Tony Pearse, along with senior members of the Waikato DFA, represented the deer industry at the presentation.

"On behalf of myself and my dear wife, who can't be here today, I accept this honour," Murray said. "I want to pass it on to all you people because nothing would have been done without you." ■



Murray Powell with Hamilton Mayor Paula Southgate. Photo courtesy of Hamilton City Council.

Another top crop of photos

The winners of the 2020 MSD Animal Health Photo Awards have been announced and the results are available on the DINZ website at: www.deernz.org/media/deer-industry-competitions/deer-industry-photo-competition

THE JUDGES WERE again impressed with the range and quality of entries, with 81 pictures to consider from 19 individuals.

The People's Choice Award was run online this year since there wasn't an opportunity to have a vote at the annual conference. We had heaps of votes through the Survey Monkey form and can announce that the winner was Kristil Leslie with "Say cheese from Grinny 258" (photo at right).

As is customary, we'll be publishing some of the best of the entries in *Deer Industry News* and they'll also be used in publicity to promote the industry.

Thanks again to all those who entered, to our judges and to MSD Animal Health for their continuing support. ■



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