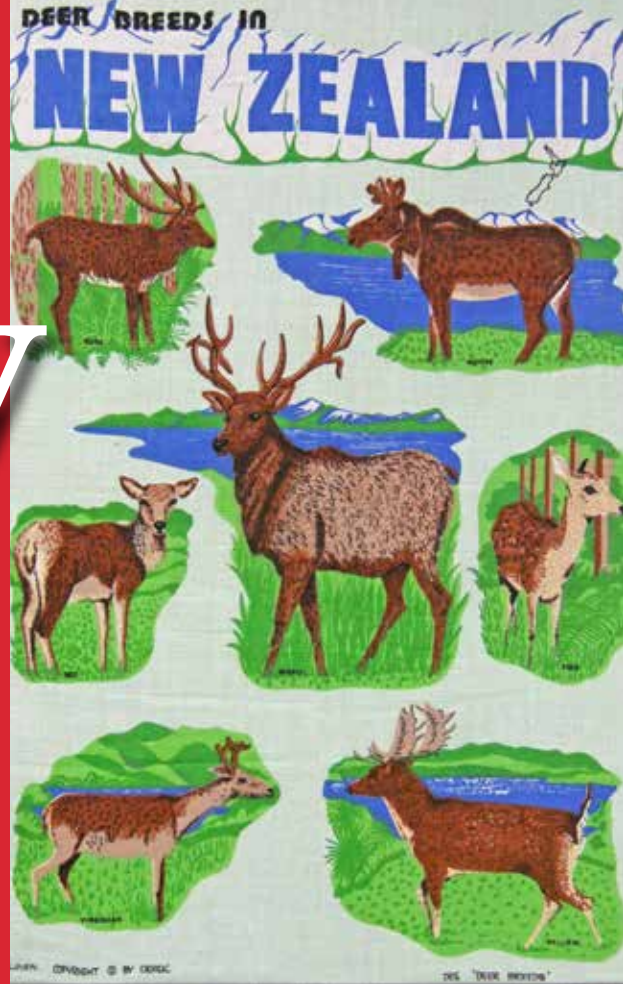


Deer Industry News

Deer Industry Conference



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Invercargill Tech Expo

GENETICS, PARASITE MANAGEMENT, TRAPS FOR SEDIMENT, WINTER GRAZING AND MORE

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DEER FARMERS IN REGION FACE HUGE CLEANUP AND STOCK RECOVERY CHALLENGES

Deer Industry News

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

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Cover: The weather was cold but the feeling was warm. Full wrap-up on the 2021 Deer Industry Conference in Invercargill. Photos: Phil Stewart. See page 3–26.

Deer Industry News is published by Deer Industry New Zealand in February, April, June, August, October and December. It is circulated to all known deer farmers, processors, exporters and others

A sustainable, resilient future

I'm often asked if venison has a sustainable future that moves it beyond the boom–bust cycle, to deliver more consistent returns that give confidence to farmers, processors and marketers to invest in our industry.



Simon Limmer.

MY ANSWER IS an emphatic “yes”. This is an exceptional New Zealand product. It consistently delivers outstanding eating experiences and nutritional attributes and is backed by the inspiring stories and integrity of its producers. But that “yes” comes with a caveat: to have a sustainable future, we must do something different.

Covid has taught us our industry must be more resilient and think, act and invest differently. We can no longer rely on limited pathways to consumers.

Foodservice in Europe and the US has been a key sector for our venison but we have now experienced what happens when something like Covid hits and that channel is closed.

At Silver Fern Farms we have started a review and rebuild of our venison strategy which seeks to build long-term resilience, profitability and stability through innovation and diversification.

Our focus has been on key questions:

- How do we increase consumption? People think of venison as a niche delicacy.
- How can we deliver our products to those who understand and are searching for venison? How do we get others to think about eating it?
- How can we reduce reliance on our existing channels?

Answering these will take time, but we are trying different things to gather parts of the answer – for example, the launch of a venison burger into New Zealand retail and a one-pound venison brick in US retail, now in over 600 stores.

We are also looking at how we build venison beyond the traditional white table-cloth dining channel in our existing markets and how we introduce it into that potentially game-changing market of China. Within our Shanghai office are people whose sole focus is to establish our venison business.

As well as our own investment in China, part of the DINZ funding is allowing our team to identify and break down barriers to consumption, building access to markets via ecommerce and strategic partnerships, and creating the perfect portfolio for this market.

We have a great product and a great story – that of New Zealand’s deer farmers – to tell.

Telling it loudly and with purpose will take both long and short-term investments that we have already committed to.

There will be no magic bullet. Hard work and well-implemented plans to attract new consumers, in more locations, through multiple channels, will meet our goal of building resilience and a sustainable venison industry.

Footnote: After three enjoyable and enlightening years on the DINZ board I have finished my term and will be replaced by Silver Fern Farms Chief Customer Officer, Dave Courtney. I thank my fellow directors and the wider DINZ group for the support, friendship and knowledge you have shared with me over my time on the board. It’s a fantastic industry with a great future and I look forward to crossing paths with you as Silver Fern Farms continues its commitment to the industry. ■

– Simon Limmer, chief executive, Silver Fern Farms

with an interest in the deer industry. The opinions expressed in *Deer Industry News* do not necessarily reflect the views of Deer Industry New Zealand or the New Zealand Deer Farmers’ Association. All content is copyright and may not be reproduced without permission and attribution.

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Unless otherwise noted, all articles in this issue are by *Deer Industry News* Editor, Phil Stewart.

Bill Richardson Transport World: what a venue!

After a year's delay following the cancellation of the 2020 deer industry conference due to Covid, Invercargill's Bill Richardson World of Transport opened its doors to the deer industry on 18–19 May and what a great venue it proved to be. Sarah Perriam of Perriam Media was MC.

WITH WELL SET-UP conference facilities upstairs and a large auditorium for the social events surrounded by a massive collection of cars, trucks and much more, the 170 or so conference delegates felt right at home.



Joc O'Donnell (centre) with fellow Southlanders Mel and John Somerville at the welcome function.

The museum and venue grew out of Bill Richardson's passion for trucks and pretty much anything with wheels. After Bill's sudden death in 2005 and the earlier and untimely death of his son Harold in 1995 it was his daughter Joc O'Donnell who stepped up with her mother and husband Scott and has taken the family

transport business and ever-growing collection of vintage trucks to new heights. The transport fleet now numbers over 800 and the business employs 1,100.

Speaking to guests at the conference welcome function (hosted by **Silver Fern Farms**), Joc O'Donnell said the development of the Bill Richardson World of Transport in Invercargill as a paid-entry venue helped spark the tourism industry in the city. "Before then everything was free and tour companies don't like taking their clients to places with no fees."

The conference centre and vehicle museum occupies most of a city block and has become something of a magnet for other types of collections,

including wearable art, quirky tea towels, about 100 vintage petrol pumps, vintage jukeboxes, pedal cars and even wedding dresses.

Conference guests enjoyed the chance to wander

around the vast venue during the evening functions and take in the amazing collections that started with one man's love of trucks. ■



Part of the extensive collection at Bill Richardson World of Transport.

Leaders assess state of industry

Invercargill greeted the 170 or so conference attendees on 18 May with a brisk 6°C and passing southerly squalls, but the temperature and mood in the excellent Bill Richardson Transport World facilities were a lot cosier.

DINZ CHAIR IAN Walker opened the conference proper with a review of what's been a jittery year for deer.

Noting this year marks 50 years of deer farming in New Zealand, Walker reflected on the industry's progression from risky, exciting and fun beginnings, to a growing understanding of how to farm and manage deer. By the 1990s, industry governance was maturing with the establishment of the NVSB to manage velvet harvest standards and by the 2000s and 2010s, initiatives like Passion2Profit were giving fresh impetus, he said.

The industry had weathered plenty of crises – Chernobyl, the Asian financial meltdown, the GFC and now Covid. "We have

had the people and the structures to bounce back from these challenges," he said.

Walker was acutely aware of the impact of Covid, especially on those producing weaners. "It was awful to lose nearly all our venison customers overnight. We couldn't have predicted it."

While some might criticise DINZ for an over-reliance on the foodservice sector, Walker was confident that was where the most value lay, and that it would bounce back as restrictions lifted. Retail will complement foodservice through the lower-value cuts, he said.

And lurking in the background before and during the Covid

continued on page 4

Leaders: continued



Ian Walker: Industry has capacity to bounce back.

crisis had been another big challenge for the industry: public expectations for water quality, animal welfare and greenhouse gas emissions. “These are driving government intrusion into farmers’ lives, creating anxiety, confusion and at times a sense that the contribution we make to the economy and the environment is not valued by our fellow Kiwis.

“We are working with other farming groups to ensure that the regulations introduced to supposedly reduce our environmental footprint are practical, affordable and don’t overwhelm farmers with compliance paperwork.” Farmers should be proud of the environmental work they were already doing, he said.



Foodservice was strongly affected by Covid but that is where the value lies for venison.

While new expectations and pressures won’t go away, they can be managed, he said. Priority issues for the DINZ board included: recovery from impacts of Covid-19 and maintaining farmer confidence in venison; risks around access to China; productivity; environment; and welfare.

The industry needed to find markets that gave competitive returns while covering increasing costs. While chefs would always be our premium customers for venison, all companies were exploring other channels and novel customers for lower-value cuts, Walker said, adding that the Passion2Profit programme funding had been redeployed to the United States to support retail programmes, and to China.

China had a lot of potential, but much of this hung on maintaining the good relationship between our two countries. “We should have contingency plans in place, should access conditions change.”

P2P-driven productivity improvements such as heavier weaning weights and growth rates were encouraging, Walker said, but these needed to be bedded in and matched by progress in the environmental and welfare arenas, not to mention profitability.

Walker said regulators were starting to understand that farmers knew how to manage their own environment better than someone behind a desk in Wellington. DINZ was continuing to lobby for improvements to the proposed water quality regulations.

“We know the options for reducing methane and nitrous oxide emissions without cutting production are limited, which is why we are continuing to fund our share of research to find mitigations against these short-lived gases.”

On animal welfare, Walker reminded the conference the

National Velveting Standards Body is a world-leading initiative, but it took continuing improvements to protect the systems. VelTrak was a step change and wasn’t taken on lightly. “It won’t provide a premium, but it shows proof of origin and assurance that if something goes wrong we can quickly and accurately track and trace velvet, minimising disruption.”

Walker acknowledged the DINZ team and thanked Simon Limmer and William Oliver, who end their board terms at the end of June. Limmer will be replaced by David Courtney of Silver Fern Farms and Oliver’s replacement will be decided by the Selection and Appointments Panel (see candidate outlines on page 30).

Strong bonds will help secure industry’s future

Innes Moffat, DINZ chief executive, followed with a more detailed look at the industry’s performance and the forces shaping its future. Venison and velvet had followed two distinct paths, with only velvet showing growth at present.

US-based Kiwi Mark Mitchell (Broadleaf) spoke briefly via a pre-recorded video, giving a vivid insight into the effects of the pandemic. He said business was doing well and bullish until Covid struck.

“By the third week of March [2020] our business had stopped. Business was down 50–80 percent. All sales shows and marketing events went dark. The market was scrambling to find proteins, but the answer wasn’t specialty meats. It was driven by beef, chicken and pork.”

Mitchell said after markets started to improve later in 2020, a second Covid wave hit, and 35 of the staff had caught the virus by the end of the year, which was very challenging. The spread was contained by the end of January.

Moffat said DINZ was acutely aware of the pressures of low prices on producers and that there was a “pretty hard cull” of breeding hinds going on. A reduction in venison production in the next five years was likely.

Producers were rewarded for fulfilling consumer needs for food safety, availability and a product with some functional purpose. Covid had disrupted this model but, like Ian Walker, he was confident the market disruptions would resolve as restaurants reopen and shipping capacity is restored. Markets had become more fragmented, however, and marketers were responding with more branded goods and a bigger range of products to fit particular niches. This added complexity for producers.

Moffat said societal expectations were changing. This was expressed through the ballot box, leading to more restrictions on animal production. Producers weren’t being rewarded for meeting these new requirements, he said.

He urged the deer industry to use its leading environmental stewardship as a positive story for the rest of New Zealand and our customers. There were several aspects to this:

1. **Shaping the narrative** by sharing our good news stories. The public is alert to paid-for “greenwashing”, so the



Innes Moffat: Expects market disruptions to continue.

narrative is most effective when farmers share their own stories, especially through social media. He gave a shout-out to High Peak Station for the stories they share online. This helped consumers in far-away markets feel more connected to their suppliers, but Moffat warned that some care was needed in selecting images and stories, in case these could be misconstrued. Involving the local community in your farming operation could also help show you were doing the right thing.

2. **Proving the concept:** We need to provide proof that we're meeting high standards – staff welfare, animal welfare and hygiene for example. Deer farming should also do a better job of reflecting the society it's part of – involving more women and Māori at decision-making levels in our industry would help. Biosecurity, traceability and better environmental standards all needed documenting. "As your marketers build brands around the world, it's essential that they know you've got their backs by being true to the values and imagery that are the basis of their brand stories." While that was a long list, Moffat reminded farmers that tools to help document their high standards, such as the RCS, NAIT and the NZ Farm Assurance Programme are already in place. Those designing these systems needed to minimise paperwork and duplication for farmers.

3. **Being prepared:** There was a small but vocal minority who disapproved of animal farming and mud, and they would be actively looking for evidence of things going wrong.

"We are very proud of our standards and practices. We have robust science that proves the high welfare standards we achieve.

"My job for you is to advocate on your behalf with regulators to make sure they understand what you do and need, and to respond to criticism to make sure you keep your freedom to operate. Your job for me is to make sure you adhere to standards for winter grazing and velvet removal."

In conclusion, Moffat said the industry had fantastic products and a good story to tell, and has good access to well-off consumers, good trade networks, relationships and market channels. "These will stand us in good stead as the vaccine rollout continues in our markets."

He acknowledged farmers needed adequate prices, and noted there were gains still to be made through better productivity and efficiency. DINZ was committed to a strong finish for the current PGP and a successor P2P programme that would better align social expectations with these improvements. The strong bonds within the deer industry would help make this happen.

DINZ acknowledges the conference's major sponsors: **Alliance Group, Datamars, FMG, Gallagher, ITM Geraldine, Rabobank and Silver Fern Farms**. Other sponsors included Allflex, Bayonet, Duncan NZ, Leader Products, First Light and OSPRI. ■

People, not paper, make the safety difference

Did you know that between 4–5 quad bikes roll on New Zealand farms, per *day*? That statistic made the audience sit up. Safer Farms general manager Tony Watson delivered that and more in a hyperactive and entertaining presentation that put farm safety in a refreshing new light.

IN KEEPING WITH the rapid-fire delivery, we'll summarise his main messages as a series of bullet points.

- You're more likely to die in a farm accident than you are to be prosecuted for health and safety breaches.
- Keeping a safe work environment requires a lot more than paperwork and signs at the gate, but:
 - If something does go wrong, you do need evidence of the safety measures you've taken. As with environmental work, photographs are a great way to document this.
 - If you're part of the NZ Farm Assurance Programme you will need some paperwork.
- Most accidents arise from human error, not unsafe conditions.
- If you get away with a close call thanks to a mistake you've made, learn from it and make changes so the risk of a worse outcome next time is removed.
- Safety isn't measured by the number of accidents that happen – they're relatively rare.
- Safety is more about capacity. If there's a high risk, look at how you can reduce it – for example by getting another hand to help with a task.

- If you are going to fail, take some measures to make sure the mishap won't hurt so much. Things like roll bars and keeping your tyres properly pumped up will help.
- Features like "squishy" mudguards on a quad will help protect you in an accident. Welded-on bull bars will hurt you.

Watson summed up with three simple take-home messages:

1. Humans make mistakes – let's make sure they aren't fatal or don't cause serious injuries.
 2. We blame or we learn – blaming is the *opposite* of learning.
 3. Safety is not the absence of accidents – it's a way of doing work.
- Watson's presentation was sponsored by **Geraldine ITM** ■



Tony Watson: Safety is a way of doing work.

Encouraging signs for venison, but patience needed

It's hard to avoid that old cliché about green shoots of recovery, but there were definitely a few encouraging signs for the venison industry. They're certainly welcome, after a pretty challenging 12 months.

NICK TAYLOR, DINZ venison marketing manager, invited three in-market partners to share their perspectives after a year of major disruption to the foodservice and freight industries thanks to Covid-19.

Mark Mitchell of Broadleaf works with Duncan NZ in the United States. He said 2021 had got off to a more positive start, but recovery would be a marathon, not a sprint. Shipping disruption was a major snag, along with labour shortages and higher costs. He said they were working hard with customers in the United States to understand their changing needs.

Taylor said the US vaccination rollout was going well (at the time of writing 43.7% of Americans were fully vaccinated and 51% had received at least one jab. Source: NPR). Sixteen US states had no restrictions on dining and 34 states had some restrictions but these were easing.

Data from the Open Table platform indicated restaurant bookings were currently 20 percent below 2019 levels – still a big improvement on last year. Foodservice research showed the US industry would be back to 85–90 percent of pre-Covid levels by the end of this year, all positive signs.

A recovery in tourism would help, but it would be slow, he said.

Improvements for chilled exports would be tied to the pace of recovery in foodservice markets. Frozen sales were doing well, but were very price driven. “But this does keep venison in people’s mouths,” Taylor said.



Nick Taylor: Improvements linked to recovery in foodservice.

In the meantime a shift from foodservice to retail would be maintained, while P2P in-market efforts would be redirected from Europe to the United States for the time being.

Taylor said an analysis of US social media showed there was good chatter around venison, which focused mainly on burgers, mince and steaks.

In Europe the vaccine rollout was lagging behind the United Kingdom. (At the time of writing, fully vaccinated figures were: UK 39.9%, Germany 19.9%, Switzerland 20.9% and Belgium 20.1%. Source:

Euronews.) Restaurants in Germany had been completely shut, with predictable consequences. However, outdoor eating restrictions in Europe were easing and indoor eating should be reappearing later in June.

Although it's not the news producers welcome, Taylor reiterated that price-sensitive customers are still capable of shifting good volumes of venison into manufactured items.

Jan Kunz of Luiten Food (Netherlands) works with Silver Fern Farms. He told the conference by video that things should improve in Europe, but the slow vaccine rollout there was a brake on the market. They would be continuing to promote online sales in the meantime as the summer season approached. “For every consumer we have a product now, like the venison burger or roast for the family.”

In a message for New Zealand farmers, Kunz said: “Keep up the good work; search for more sustainability. Consumers [ask] us to have a true story about water, energy, how you treat the animals. It's a very important unique selling proposition for us.”

Alexander Eyckeler works with Alliance in Europe. He said customers are keen to try something new but need to understand how to use it, so they were working on product demonstrations.

He agreed with Kunz about customer needs: “Young consumers care. They want answers. How old are the animals? How are they treated? Is it sustainable? Is the complete animal being used?”

Chef Shannon Campbell, who represents DINZ in Germany, was still working hard to keep venison top of mind for chefs and culinary schools during the Covid-enforced hiatus, Taylor said. A tasting pack sent out for chefs had generated a lot of social media content.

While the P2P focus had shifted to North America, customers in Europe were still being supported. For example, Shannon Campbell worked with Alliance partner Bimpex in Belgium to develop some sauces and spices for consumers to go with venison.

Foundational work to develop markets in China was also continuing, Taylor reported. This included development of a Chinese website and WeChat social media platform, a primary business tool for those selling New Zealand venison to their customers.

Silver Fern Farms' China marketing project was chosen by an independent panel to secure money from a contestable fund for its work in China (see below). There was no great venison tradition in Chinese cuisine, so work was being done with chefs there on cuts and specifications that suit their needs. Chinese chefs had suggested that the traditional European cuts might be too limiting for what they want to do with the product.

continued on page 8

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Meat matters: From left, Terry O'Connell (Alliance), Rob Kidd (Duncan NZ), Matt Gibson (First Light), John Sadler (Mountain River) and Peter Robinson (Silver Fern Farms).

Ground venison to help secure US retail customers

Alliance marketing manager **Terry O'Connell** said it had been a challenging 24 months for the company. While beef and lamb were doing okay, venison had been “savaged”. China and the United States (a protein-consuming “juggernaut” that consumes 75.3 million tonnes of meat per year) will lead the recovery, he said.

Forcing your way into US retail space with a non-traditional protein was tough, O'Connell said. Consumers would pay a premium for health-conscious, sustainable products, however. Although the US market was hard to service, Alliance had the resources of the Lamb Company at its disposal, with facilities in LA, New Jersey and Toronto.

Ground (minced) venison provided a pathway to US consumers, as a convenient, flexible product with a low risk of failure and it could use 45–55 percent of the carcass. “This allows us to move further up the value chain with minimum investment.”

O'Connell said that nearly \$1m was being invested in US marketing this year with input from DINZ and MPI's P2P programme, and companies. “It must be well targeted in a market of this scale.” A loin steak was the first product launched (80 stores, in April) and early signs were good.



Alliance is active with its Pure South brand in the United Kingdom.

A ground product is set to follow.

O'Connell said the success of “tough old buffalo”, finished on grain to make it palatable, showed the potential for minority proteins like venison.

He said Alliance was also active with Pure South venison in the UK and Europe market, such as leg steaks sold through online retailer Ocado and venison items listed with Hello Fresh.

The non-meat category (e.g. for petfood, pharmaceuticals and nutraceuticals) could also extract significant value from deer carcasses, O'Connell said.

Boom and bust cycles with venison helped no-one, he added. A more mature approach was needed. Forward contracts for supplying retail and foodservice would give certainty for suppliers and customers.

Some changes will be permanent

Robb Kidd, Duncan NZ said venison had been “cranking” along in 2018 before a couple of factors started putting on the brakes: the popping of the petfood bubble and the frozen prices in Europe getting out of whack with local product. Then Covid came along and exports dropped 85 percent.

Kidd said some restaurants won't reopen and some new habits like online retail will persist. While shipping problems and high airfreight costs were a real problem for now, Kidd urged farmers to take the long-term view with venison and not make any rash decisions.

A lot of the marketing was now straight to consumers rather than being mediated through foodservice, so it was important to understand consumer perspectives, he said. “Emotion trumps logic nine times out of ten, so we have to strike an emotional chord with consumers, promoting the health benefits to consumers of all ages.”

Tapping into US meat culture

First Light general manager marketing **Matt Gibson** has a background in the hunting industry as a guide and camera operator. He said in the United States venison was seen either as an exotic meat, available through fine dining, or associated with traditional hunting during the roar in winter when shot venison is “terrible to eat”.

He said celebrities like Joe Rogan and Steve Rinella were bringing hunting and wild meats to a wider audience through their

widely viewed TV shows. Most of the audience was urban and couldn't hunt, but the shows were attuning them to the benefits of meats like venison, Gibson said.

Venison also fitted well with the large US meat smoking/curing/BBQ culture.

The Steak Club, a meat pack subscription service for high-end customers, was providing another useful outlet for quality venison, he said. Subscribers for the monthly mid-range package get 2.5kg of meat – the mix is always a surprise – along with detailed cooking kits for US\$150 a month. Gibson said a more venison and BBQ-focused “Wild at Heart” package was in the offing.

Let's reclaim that value

John Sadler, Mountain River Venison, said the US Arby's promotion a couple of years ago hoovered up all the venison steaks they could supply within the first few days of what was supposed to be a month-long programme. It did show there was an appetite for venison, however.

He said it was shocking that the industry had to discount its product by \$50m to achieve the same sales volumes in the wake of Covid. The challenge for New Zealand venison exporters was to reclaim that value.

He said Mountain River has a 17-year supply relationship with French retailer Picard, which has 900 stores. While there was still a mismatch between the supply and demand peaks, using frozen product helped smooth out the bumps. “Last year they sold out and this year orders have increased.”

In China, Covid had a “brutal” effect on sales, Sadler said, but work was continuing through Hunter McGregor. He was now supplying venison through the Australian-owned Melbourne restaurant in China. Feedback from the Chinese customers there was informing choice of cuts and showing the types of dishes that would work.

In the United States they continued to work through D'Artagnan, a top-end supplier whose retail sales increased 70 percent during Covid. They are also now going to work with start-up Force of Nature using some P2P funding, starting with three venison products.

Force of Nature is focused on provenance and regenerative agriculture – a practice already being used by many New Zealand farmers. The company had made a lot of money out of its venison trim-based “Epic” snack bars and was reinvesting the profits into regenerative agriculture products.

In summary, Sadler said foodservice would rebound, new retail channels would continue and so would disruption recur. He urged the industry to engage with the climate change movement and those who advocate eating less meat. “That suits us – we don't have a lot of meat to sell!”

Opportunity in disguise?

Peter Robinson, group sales manager with Silver Fern Farms quipped that adversity was just opportunity in disguise. The venison marketing crisis precipitated by Covid was certainly a candidate, and the company wasted no time devising strategies to turn things around.

Robinson said the venison recovery and growth project had maximised and protected existing business. No stone was left

untaken in the hunt for ways to increase consumption, get it to people and replace existing channels. For example, a venison burger launched as part of a three-species range had proven very successful, while in the United States a one-pound “brick” of ground venison was proving a winner. It's in 600 stores, with this number set to double by the end of 2021. This would give a foothold with retailers to discuss “range extension” for venison products.

Venison was in a great position to capitalise on two US trends: pushback against industrial agriculture, coupled with an increase in home cooking skills during lockdowns.

Silver Fern Farms' “Project Roosevelt” is designed to build the presence of venison in US markets using e-commerce platforms, and creating a “lifestyle” brand targeting outdoor enthusiasts.

In China, “Project Moon-shot” aims to educate consumers about venison. Using DINZ [contestable funding] support, the company is focusing on retail, foodservice and petfood channels in China. There is resource dedicated to venison in Silver Fern's Shanghai office. They have already been running chef workshops, demonstrations and trade shows, and doing local research.

“We're excited to be now promoting three venison products with a strategic ecommerce partner in Shanghai.” Pet owners in China also presented a significant opportunity, he added.

“This won't happen overnight, but this market is a potential game changer for New Zealand venison.”

Q+A with the venison companies

Conference goers had plenty of questions for company representatives after their presentations. Key points to emerge in the constructive Q+A session were:

- Near-term prospects are good and this year's chilled season should match last year's.
- Getting product to market (logistics) is the biggest challenge.
- Frozen consumption of existing stock during the game season will set sentiment in Europe. It's hoped those inventories will reduce.
- Shipping delays could erode shelf life for chilled product and you can't insure against delays.
- On the question of wapiti versus high-growth red genetics, a diplomatic answer was: there is demand for wapiti as a product.
- On the reason why young animals that grow to over 85kg carcass weight due to processing delays are being penalised, the answer was complex: Covid shut down the market for “young heavies” in the foodservice sector; heavy young deer don't have a premium price market in Europe. However, as more markets reopen, especially in North America where heavier animals are more acceptable, the price differential between under and over 85kg carcasses will reduce. Also the answer is in numbers – it's easier to sell decent numbers of either small (e.g. fallow) or large (wapiti) carcasses than just a handful.
- There is a risk of a supply shortage if too many people exit deer because of lower venison prices now, and the cost of fencing deer out of waterways. Companies urged farmers to take a longer-term view as prices recover, and retain their deer.
- Companies denied that the schedule drop to keep product flowing might have been too great. One commented that the actual market had dropped *below* the schedule during the worst period. ■

Farmers quiz Zoom-in minister

Agriculture Minister, Damien O'Connor popped into the conference by Zoom and fielded a range of questions from delegates. Environmental regulations and trade dominated the discussion. The following are highlights from the Q & A session with delegates. Questions are summarised in the subheadings and the minister's answers summarised in the text.

Risks of forestry taking good pastoral land

There is now 70,000 hectares less forestry than in 2000. The area is expanding however. It's not always on land suitable for farming, but some whole-farm conversions are happening. The Government is reviewing rules with a view to requiring any land class 5 and under needing consent to plant in trees. (A lot of forestry is going onto class 6 and above.)

Permanent radiata forest on steep hill country is not a viable option – it would cause environmental harm when it died. The Government is keeping an eye on that. While owners want the right to use their land for the best outcome, the Government wants to avoid negative consequences when unsuitable land is planted. A lot of radiata planting is going onto land classes 5–7.

Winter grazing rules practical?

Changes will be needed to the initial regulations as drafted – some were impractical. The outcomes are the main thing. There has been a big lift in practices and hopefully that will continue.

How will Resource Management Act reform affect changes to freshwater rules?

The RMA is a beast. It needs to be consistent with the National Environmental Standards and reduce bureaucracy through an integrated farm plan. A lot of deer farmers have been showing initiative. Requirements around Significant Natural Areas need to be standardised and consistent with freshwater standards. Hopefully a lot of this will align with the work deer farmers have already been doing.

Government policies are restricting our ability to grow export revenue – what's being done to empower farmers?

There are limits on volumes of production per hectare, so the emphasis needs to shift to extracting more value through brand values like "grass fed", nutrition claims and so on.

Trade negotiation progress with UK and EU?

The UK is in more of a hurry to secure a deal, but negotiations with the EU are further ahead. We want a quality agreement with the EU and hope to secure something by the end of the year. There



Agriculture Minister Damien O'Connor acknowledged winter grazing practices are already improving.

have been four sets of talks with the UK, with some niggles around agriculture. Nothing is locked in yet.

What about China? We are investing a lot in that market

We have a mature and important relationship with China, but we're keeping our trade doors open with other regions too, such as the Middle East. There is increased risk of market disruption, so we need to be ready to pivot to other markets if necessary.

Are we in danger of making sacrifices for the ETS and finding other countries keep using subsidies and don't follow our example?

We have an opportunity to show we can produce good livestock protein and reduce emissions over time. The United States has committed to halving emissions by 2030 – an ambitious target. Most countries are committed to cutting agriculture emissions by 10 percent by 2030 and to be carbon neutral by 2050.

We've had to progress trade negotiations on the basis that if we [take emissions reduction measures] others will follow. We don't have a lot of leverage, so leading by example can be the best way. The fact that other countries are subsidising agriculture to meet their targets shouldn't affect what we do. We have set agriculture targets for 2030, and haven't set them for 2050 yet. We will lead by example and put pressure on for others to remove their subsidies – on fisheries and fossil fuels as well as agriculture.

What's the Government doing to support rural mental health?

There are pressures on farmers here, although we've done better than some other countries. A lot of the mental health pressure is on farm workers as well as owners. The Government is putting additional money into mental health support and some of that is targeted at rural communities. It's also helping the Rural Support Trust. But some of the most effective help also comes "over the fence" from within communities.

The Government is reducing opportunities for wealth creation, such as live exports. What are you doing to create opportunities?

It's important to create and retain wealth within the economy, unlike banking where the profit goes offshore. We'll create wealth by measures we're taking now, e.g. on environment and welfare, future-proofing our businesses. We need to ensure these aren't undermined. Rules on country of origin labelling here will help support local producers. Ultimately it will be consumers who support the producers who reach the highest standards. ■

Velvet: Steady progress through choppy waters

Excellent partnerships in our markets have helped the velvet sector navigate its way through some turbulent conditions over the past 18 months, reported Rhys Griffiths, DINZ manager, markets.

PRODUCTION WAS UP 5–10 percent for the 2020/21 season as expected, while prices dropped 10–15 percent reflecting a risk premium for importers. Griffiths said while it is never good when the price drops, growers were happy that their product was still moving.

The caution shown by importers turned out to be well founded, as some faced major logistical challenges getting product to market. Some importers had to wait four months to clear their freight, Griffiths said. “Disruptions like these are likely to continue, with ongoing issues around sea freight and a lack of commercial passenger flights.”

He said virtual market tours – there have been three to date – were an excellent way of keeping in close touch with our customers in Asia. (For more on these tours see page 40.)

Customers loved hearing directly from New Zealand velvet producers, he said. The virtual tours were followed up with advertising in the two main Oriental medicine magazines, which built on the “Made with Care” branding.

Griffiths took the opportunity to organise a two-day induction to the market for New Zealand’s incoming trade commissioner to Korea, Stephen Blair, when he travelled to Korea late last year, visiting places like Yuhan New Origin and LG. This generated good local publicity.

The really good news is that the development of new velvet-based products in Korea has been continuing apace this year. Corner stores were another exciting new channel in Korea, with the company Pulmuone selling through these.

While companies were generally positive, the Korean economy did shrink, which affected some top-end products. Offline (physical shops) and duty free stores suffered badly from the loss of tourists, but online sales have been doing well.

New Zealand holds about 80 percent of the velvet-based healthy food market that has been created, “but we can’t expect to have that to ourselves forever,” he said. Competitors such as Russia were muscling in and getting some traction, including through sponsorship of a “K-Pop” band.



Goes like this: Rhys Griffiths explains the K-pop craze in Korea.

Griffiths said New Zealand still had a market advantage through “ESG” – environment, social (connections) and governance (systems like RCS and VelTrak really play a big part in this).

China was a rapidly emerging market and companies there were investigating the healthy food strategy through the China Velvet Coalition (see *Deer Industry News* February and April 2021).

Overall the velvet industry was stable and growing, with investment happening in both China and Korea.

New Zealand’s Ambassador to Korea, Philip Turner, sent a video message to the conference, noting that Korea takes two-thirds of our velvet exports. He said we were shifting from a focus on volume to value, and an emphasis on quality, safety and environmental values. “New Zealand satisfies Korean consumers on all of those aspects.”

Beaming in from the markets

Griffiths then tackled the technically nerve-racking but successful challenge of beaming in three people from three countries live to the conference: it worked.

continued on page 12



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Velvet: continued



Taking questions from left: Rhys Griffiths, Shaun Stevenson, Tony Cochrane, Ross Chambers and (on screen) Felix Shen, Seamus Harris (top) and JongKyu Jang.

JongKyu Jang has been working with DINZ from Korea for 8 years on the healthy food strategy. He said there had been a lot of activity in the Korean market over the past decade, working in the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and healthy food sectors.

Velvet products were available through many channels – especially online and through TV shopping – and the challenge now was to differentiate New Zealand product from Russian, Chinese and local Korean velvet.

This required a “standout” story. Activity like the new sponsorship of a deer environment award by a Korean company (SP Corp) was one way our brand could stand out better. Other good news angles could include newly discovered benefits such as immune function, good traceability (VelTrak) and closer relationships with New Zealand, right down to individual farms.

Taiwan-based **Seamus Harris** briefed the conference on this market. He said it’s a small, traditional market for velvet, but KGC has launched its first New Zealand velvet product in Taiwan – the company is already well established there. The new “Everytime” healthy food product promoted by Korean actor Lee Min-Ho, sells for a premium price of NZ\$300 for a month’s supply. “The New Zealand origin has been highlighted.” Local health food companies’ interest was piqued and one company is now making genuine enquiries. There are regulatory challenges in Taiwan, however. Velvet can be sold as a TCM and also as a food. The TCM sector was lobbying for stricter rules. Products with a high velvet content and sold as functional foods would likely need registration, but this shouldn’t present a big barrier, Harris said.

Health and wellness focus

Felix Shen recently started working for the China Velvet Coalition in Shanghai (see April *Deer Industry News*, p9). He said 230 million people in China went out to travel around the country during the last long holiday. The only restriction now was the need to wear a mask in some public places. He said the population was growing more slowly, becoming better educated and ageing. “More people are focusing on health and wellness.” He said GDP per capita was now over US\$10,000, people in the 18–25 age group prioritised spending on health among other things, and the average spend on health food was US\$30 per year, well below

spending in the United States or Korea. All of this created good potential for health food products in China, he said.

Q+A session

Tony Cochrane (PGG Wrightson), Shaun Stevenson (CK Import Export) and Ross Chambers (Provelco) joined the overseas speakers for a Q+A session.

What is happening to the additional velvet levy?

Cochrane said much of that was targeted at licence to operate and upgrades such as VelTrak. He said the huge growth potential in our markets needed to be supported by investment – for example, working through regulatory barriers.

Are our grading guidelines fit for purpose?

Tweaks were needed because velvet had changed, especially with spiker velvet and non-traditional heads, Cochrane said. It was hoped guidelines could be updated by next season. Stevenson said research was showing better bioactive content in velvet cut earlier. Griffiths said more attention needed to be paid to what was happening within antler – it was no longer about aesthetics alone. *How will the three partners in the China Velvet Coalition work together?*

Chambers said the three shared a common purpose. “We’re stronger together, along with DINZ and NZTE. I’m confident we can make it work.” Cochrane agreed, noting that the three companies would retain their independence but create some critical mass. “We’re excited about the potential.”

Will there be a premium for higher [bioactive] content velvet?

Stevenson agreed there could be in future if this could be demonstrated.

How big is the potential market in China, given the growth in production here?

Shen said the total health food market in China was about NZ\$66 billion, and the market for health products containing velvet was only about NZ\$9–\$11 million so far. “So only a small proportion of health food products in China contain velvet at this stage.”

Will VelTrak help add value to velvet in the China healthy food market?

“Definitely,” said Tony Cochrane. ■

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Proof of integrity from farm to market



VelTrak

VelTrak: the way of the future

If you don't know about VelTrak by now, you must have been off the grid for a while. We won't go through the system in detail here (there's a link below for that, and see the advertisements on page 13 and your coversheet). However, two conference speakers put some interesting context around the new track-and-trace system for velvet and why it's the way of the future.

MARK HARRIS is a DINZ board member and Gallagher's marketing manager animal management, so has a unique perspective on VelTrak's importance.

He said some of Gallagher's electronic products like their fence energisers can have two or three hundred separate components. They rely on the integrity of the trusted brands and components that go into these. He said if one component fails they can't deliver – the problem needs sorting quickly.

“We have to be sure that all our components are traceable if there's a problem, so we can identify and fix it. The same applies to the products we supply to healthy food companies.”

He said product faults might be rare but they needed to be addressed quickly if they did occur, which is why VelTrak was so important for the velvet industry.

VelTrak is one of many moving parts in our velvet industry and a very important part of the brand story for New Zealand velvet, he said.



Mark Harris said traceability systems like VelTrak help get any problems identified and sorted quickly.

DINZ manager, markets **Rhys Griffiths** said New Zealand velvet now inhabits a very different space than it did in past years, when more than 90 percent was sold into undifferentiated channels with no product stewardship.

Those days are over. Velvet is now a \$100m industry and DINZ has been working hard with key partners to build a brand story around environment, vitality and product integrity. He said VelTrak supported this

change by providing improved traceability to meet regulatory requirements and good brand positioning.

While paper VSDs were themselves an improvement when they were introduced, they were still subject to human error and no longer fit for purpose in a food safety-aware marketplace. VelTrak was a natural and necessary progression that provided greater confidence and a link to our assurance systems such as the Regulated Control Scheme and NVSB.

Griffiths said a couple of market partners had already raised the prospect of one day using QR codes to provide a direct link for customers to farms of origin. “That would help us entrench the New Zealand velvet brand while improving the marketing story for our key partners.”

New Zealand's trade commissioner in Korea, Stephen Blair, sent a pre-recorded message congratulating DINZ and the deer industry for VelTrak. “It's what consumers and buyers here in Korea are expecting and demanding.”

DINZ quality assurance manager **John Tacon** followed with a run-through on VelTrak. If you haven't registered for VelTrak yet (time is running out!) and want to learn more, visit: www.deernz.org/dinz-activity/veltrak/what-will-change-farmers ■



This is how your tagged velvet will look from the 2021/22 season onward.

Benchmarked production and Johne's disease info on your deer

The graph shows 'Carcass weight' on the y-axis (ranging from 40 to 70) and 'Season' on the x-axis (ranging from 2013 to 2021). A blue shaded area represents a benchmark range between approximately 48 and 58. A red line with circular markers shows the actual carcass weight for each season: 2013 (~52), 2014 (~53), 2015 (~55), 2016 (~51), 2017 (~60), 2018 (~59), 2019 (~58), 2020 (~61), and 2021 (~63).

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DPO121

Passion2Profit – where to now?

P2P farm performance manager Phil McKenzie reminded the conference that the successful Primary Growth Partnership with MPI was nearing the end of its life, but plans were well underway to put up a case for successor programme that would build on P2P.

THE SESSION BEGAN with an outline by Emma Buchanan of the Natural Knowledge Project, another MPI programme. This provides funding for up to 150 deer farms to have their Farm Environment Plans (FEP) done or existing ones updated, including the all-important greenhouse gas numbers. With the help of some MPI funding, it's hoped the number of farms getting their FEPs funded could be stretched up to about 200.



Emma Buchanan explains the Natural Knowledge project.

Buchanan stressed that the data would be anonymised and that the exercise would be presenting a very positive story to MPI. "It's a pretty low-risk, gentle introduction to getting an FEP done." The programme would provide DINZ with a good dataset to inform policy work, and it would also increase the knowledge of consultants.

There's more on this in our report on the DFA branch chairs' meeting on page 27.

P2P advisory group founding chair, **Mandy Bell**, told the conference there had been good continuity within the group over the seven years of the programme as members left and new ones joined, and that would continue. Over the past year there had been three changes of personnel:

- Gavin Sheath replaced by farm systems expert, **Mark Paine** (also taking over as chair)
- Andy Macfarlane replaced by farm consultant **Wayne Allan**
- Paddy Boyd replaced by Lake Coleridge Downs general manager **Tony Plunkett**.

Other members of the group are Karen Middelberg (newly joined, DFA rep), Gerard Hickey, First Light, DINZ appointee Innes Moffat and DINZ observer Ian Walker. Phil McKenzie, Tony Pearce and Rob Aloe (DINZ) also attended group meetings.

Phil McKenzie started by thanking farmers for contributing their "hearts and minds" to P2P. He said the programme continued through lockdown, using Zoom meetings to keep people in touch and engage experts from overseas to assess the programme when needed.

He said the market-facing part of P2P that he looks after had developed a wealth of resources such as the deer facts, growth curve charts, breeding values/Deer Select and parasite workshops. People-focused activities included P2P Advance Parties, Regional Workshops, Deer Industry Environment Groups, rural professionals programmes and vet student training.

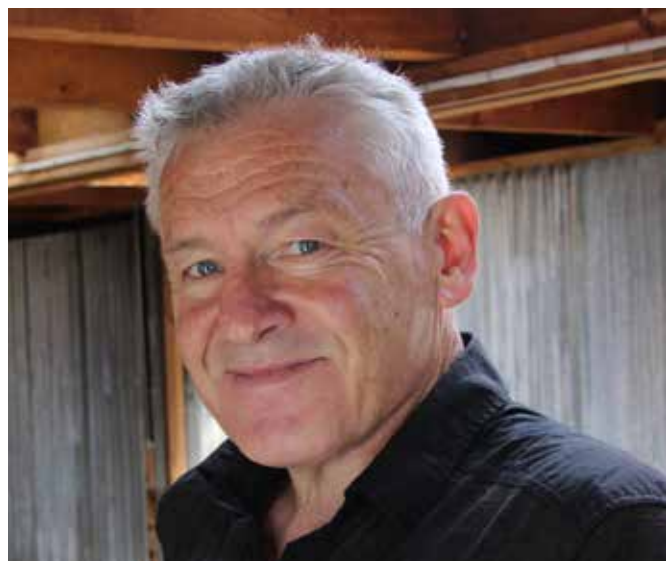
McKenzie said the time was right to take a good look at P2P and question it. "If P2P was looking for a job and we wanted to hire it, what would we want it to do?"

He wants feedback from farmers on what they see as the biggest achievements and strengths. "We also need to hear from stakeholders and customers on what they want." That leads on to questions about what we really care about and what are our most compelling aspirations, he said.

The next step will be to define what resources are needed to achieve these – and how we would measure our success under a new post-P2P programme.

McKenzie said P2P is viewed as a success by deer farmers, and by many outside the deer industry, and aspects of it are being imitated. Consultation and design prototyping for a successor programme involving a wide group of stakeholders (e.g. rural professionals, other change managers as well as farmers) will continue for the rest of this year. As with the current P2P, the successor programme will be built from the ground up by farmers and those who support them. A draft strategy and business plan will be presented to the Advisory Group with recommendations for the DINZ board by early next year.

"You know this programme is special to the industry – let's keep it going!" ■



Phil McKenzie: Farmers will be among the stakeholders helping design the successor to P2P from the ground up.

Dealing with stress

It's been a tough old year for many in the primary sector, so Lance Burdett's keynote address, "Challenging our Challenges" was a welcome breath of fresh air for anyone who's been feeling under pressure in recent times.

BURDETT, OF WARN International was a builder before embarking on a long career in policing, where he specialised in emergency response and crisis negotiation. He knows only too well how people respond to stress and fear, and how to help pull people back from the brink. Helping people with their mental health and resilience when they are stressed is now his fulltime career.

But this session was far from gloomy – in fact it was a lot of fun.

Burdett explained that our brains have to work hard making numerous decisions quickly, which can be stressful. But while we are quite clever, our brains like to make connections and assumptions and they don't always get it right, he said.

And while adults learn to cope by hiding emotions such as fear – a survival strategy – young people tend to catastrophise and see danger where it doesn't exist. Social media tends to amplify the fear response in youngsters, who can be prone to anxiety.

Burdett said the hormone cortisol helps you focus your response to danger, while adrenaline gives you the physical boost for fight-or-flight. Problems came when these hormone responses were prolonged and not matched by actual dangers.

The Covid pandemic had caused a lot of anxiety in people by overstimulating their subconscious. Something as simple as a long walk and good breathing exercises would help combat these stresses by getting a good dose of dopamine dumped in the brain. Restoring this hormonal balance also restored logical thought and had a calming effect, he said.

Things like socialisation and teamwork, good diet, exercise and sleep all helped improve mood.

Burdett showed how simple techniques like a breathing exercise – six seconds in and six seconds out for two minutes – could help disrupt negative thinking and restore a feeling of calmness.

He got the whole audience doing it – and they seemed pretty chill when he was done.

"There's no silver bullet. It's all about 'leaving it at the door' and taking control. It takes hard work and time – you won't see yourself starting to come out of that hole. The key is that you must do something about it. We are actually better and stronger than we think we are. Go with your heart and not your head, because your heart knows best."

• For further information: www.warninternational.com ■



Lance Burdett: "Your heart knows best."

Green waves from all directions

The pressures on agriculture now are as impactful as the reforms of the 1980s, according to Blake Holgate, Rabobank head of sustainable business development. Speaking at the deer industry conference, Holgate said agriculture would be experiencing transformational change over the next five years.

THE PRESSURES ARE not just coming from regulators, Holgate warned. Major companies and food product buyers such as Nestlé were also committed to a more sustainable future. That pressure would be applied to farmers through supply chains.

Global capital markets were also being rocked by green waves, with investment strategies shifting to more sustainable companies and away from legacy industries like coal. Defining sustainability and avoiding "greenwashing" (creating only the appearance of sustainability) were challenges to be addressed, he said.

While agriculture needed to account for its impacts through outputs like nitrogen and greenhouse gas emissions, it should also claim environmental credit for the things it was doing right.

In a changing business environment for farming, some restrictions (e.g., on land use) would impose an opportunity cost, while compliance would also get more complicated.

But it wasn't all bad news. There were opportunities for efficiencies, matching production to the natural capital of the land. Forestry was one option, but with the wrong policy settings we

Doing well on welfare, but...

Since the conference John Tacon, the longest-serving staff member in DINZ by a country mile, has announced his retirement, effective from the end of July (see also awards night article on page 25). But for the time being it was business as usual and Tacon had a cautiously positive report card for the industry.

IT WAS CAUTIOUS because, as is well known, it only takes one bad welfare or quality assurance case to undo the huge amount of good work that's being done throughout the industry.

Tacon said the National Velveting Standards Body (NVSB) had a stable membership (Ian Scott, chair, plus Andrew Scurr, Peter Allan and Paddy Boyd). Ian Walker and NZ Veterinary Association Deer Branch chair Amy Watts were also observers to NVSB.

The number of accredited velvetters is also reasonably stable. Currently it's officially 1,149, although this includes some in abeyance so the number active is likely around 1,000.

Tacon said the Regulated Control Scheme (RCS), which started in 2017, was a blessing in retrospect. "The NVSB had seen the need for sheds to be upgraded for years before this."

The three-year implementation phase was nearly complete. Tacon said the velveting auditors had added RCS audits to their qualifications. "It's been a big job for them, juggling their own farm commitments and additional auditing."

The RCS had winkled out far more deer sheds than Tacon initially thought existed. "We found 1,246. I thought there were only about 900!" The RCS audits had a variety of outcomes, from sheds being pulled down and rebuilt, to repainting, to a simple pen plan of the clean area. Some were already compliant.

Tacon said just 54 sheds still had to be audited, 1,005 had been audited and passed, 114 opted out, six were non-compliant and 67 were awaiting actions.

The Code of Welfare for deer was due for revision but was at the bottom of the pile for NAWAC since the current code was seen to

be still working well. There would be a few changes, but nothing major when it did get to the top of the pile.

On compliance with welfare requirements, Tacon said the industry was doing well, "but don't let up!"

All of the systems in place such as On-farm QA, Transport QA and NVSB had helped, "but we couldn't do it without you." Voluntary velvet surveillance by MPI at processors was in its 14th year and had been a great success over time. Tacon said MPI was pleased with the way regulators and industry cooperated to improve the welfare of deer. Only four out of 608 transport-related welfare compliance issues identified by inspectors over the past 12 months had involved deer.

As always, one of the biggest risks to the industry is public perception and Tacon finished by urging farmers to keep up the good work. ■



Good shed design and careful adherence to transport standards are part of the positive welfare story for deer.

Green waves: continued

could see good productive land lost to trees.

Holgate said pressures on agriculture aren't exclusive to New Zealand, and our good environmental performance should give us some advantages. That said, the "challenged 10 percent" who struggle to meet environmental regulations could be a liability. He said about 70 percent of farmers can comply when they adopt best practice, while the top 20 percent are already compliant.

Output-based regulations were far preferable to input-based restrictions as used in Europe. "I can't tell you what the final freshwater restraints will be here, but we can see the direction of travel."

For New Zealand, environmental considerations will increasingly drive land use, farm systems and innovation. He said that where nitrogen loss and emissions are issues, then land uses may change. There were other constraints to consider too, like access to water and availability of labour.

While forestry had great potential to sequester carbon, there was a risk of losing good land to blanket planting if we are limited

to the constraints (e.g., on minimum block sizes) within the ETS rules.

Holgate advised farmers to make good use of technology to capture data to inform decisions and show regulators what was being done. Good infrastructure, such as rural broadband, was essential to support the transformational change in agriculture.

"You'll need to understand your long-term risks and opportunities, incorporate these into your planning, integrate data tools into your operation and adopt a mindset that good environmental practice is just a part of good farming." ■



Blake Holgate: Forestry an option but policy settings need to be right.

State of (environmental) nation

Deer farmers can take a lot of the credit for the high regard the sector is held in when it comes to progress on the environment.

IN HIS KEYNOTE presentation, DINZ environmental stewardship manager Lindsay Fung said initiatives such as the 2018 Environmental Management Code of Practice and the earlier Landcare Manual were very much farmer driven, a secret to their success.

He singled out the Southland Environmental Advance Party for praise, for its close engagement with Environment Southland. One of its members, Michelle Roberts, was involved in the regional forum, a community-based group that will advise Environment Southland's council and Te Ao Marama board members on how they can achieve community aspirations for freshwater. In 2019 the entire Advance Party won an Environment Southland community award.

Fung said that in three years the group, facilitated by Nicola McGrouther, had provided excellent peer-to-peer support. They had trialled sediment traps, assessed winter housing, done Farm Environment Plans, worked on GHG numbers and much more.

Beyond that, deer farmers were doing great work and engaging well with their regional councils around the country, usually through the NZDFA. Progress with councils had been variable. Canterbury was an especially difficult area thanks to the numerous plan changes and different catchment zones. But nevertheless the Canterbury West Coast and South Canterbury/North Otago branches of the DFA have proactively sought to help train Farm Environment Plan auditors on deer farming good management practices. Similarly the involvement of the Waikato and Waipa branches of DFA in Environment Waikato's drystock liaison committee has been well received with Environment Waikato endorsing the deer industry's Environmental Management Code of Practice.

While no deer farm is perfect, the industry had much to be proud of, Fung said. He quoted the example of a Hawke's Bay farmer who had shifted a self-feed silage pit. This happened not because a bureaucrat had told him to, but as a result of discussion with his industry peers – a good example of farmer-to-farmer relationships working.

Fung reminded farmers that their methods have relatively low environmental impacts. For example, only about 2–4 percent of feed is imported on average. Husbandry is low intensity and welfare standards are high, so contaminant losses aren't serious (although sediment loss is always a risk to be managed).

Looking at government environmental policies affecting deer farming, Fung highlighted three: freshwater management, greenhouse gases and biodiversity. These national policies could affect everyone, he said.

The main freshwater issues were around intensive winter grazing (see article on page 20) and stock exclusion. The initial policy on freshwater had some good outcomes, including no stock exclusion required on slopes of more than 10° and allowances for stock crossings.

Fung welcomed the government commitment to reconsidering

the universally criticised rules on sowing dates, pugging depths and so on. "We're also asking for the low-slope method for assessing stock exclusion to be shifted to farm environment plan level."

For indigenous biodiversity Fung said the biggest concern was proposed regulation about the establishment of significant natural areas on private land, and impacts on adjacent areas.

Greenhouse gas emission measures were the most pressing environmental issue for farmers over the next five years. The biggest issue would be the price that was finally set for emissions.

Fung noted that measures taken to protect biodiversity would probably have spinoff benefits to efforts on freshwater quality and greenhouse gases. That required less of a policy silo framework and a more holistic approach by government.

Make it stop!

Notwithstanding all of the above, Fung acknowledged that deer farmers are getting fed up with the pressure being put on them through government policy and public expectations on environment.

He had a few simple pointers to help "make it stop".

1. Get your Farm Environment Plan done if you haven't already (and remembering the opportunity to get this funded through the Natural Knowledge Project)
 2. Join groups to help support your environmental journey: through P2P Deer Industry Environment Groups, catchment groups and so on.
 3. Support your local DFA branch when they're making representations to regional councils on plan changes. This really does make a difference!
 4. Know your greenhouse gas number (see article on page 19 for more on the tools available).
 5. If something seems unfair in terms of environmental restrictions, speak up – either directly or through DFA or DINZ.
 6. Show off what you're doing to improve environmental outcomes on your place.
- This session was sponsored by **First Light** ■



Only about 2–4 percent of feed is imported on average.

Know your GHG number – the clock’s ticking

Farmers have a lot on their compliance plate at the moment and the requirement to know your greenhouse gas (GHG) emission number by the end of next year represents a fairly big serving.



Lindsay Fung: Deer industry is well represented in He Waka Eke Noa partnership.

THIS COMES AS part of the He Waka Eke Noa partnership (HWEN – see page 20, April/May *Deer Industry News*). DINZ environmental stewardship manager Lindsay Fung said HWEN comprised 13 partner organisations including DINZ, plus six working groups.

The HWEN partnership between the Government, farming and Māori interests is an alternative to the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) as a way of meeting our international emissions commitments.

Fung is part of HWEN’s policy group and farm performance manager Phil McKenzie is in their policy implementation group. A deer farmer is part of their sequestration working group – in fact the deer industry is the only farming organisation to have direct farmer input into a working group. There are also four deer farmers in the wider industry reference group for HWEN, so the deer industry is well represented, Fung said.

The independent Climate Change Commission established under the 2019 Zero Carbon Act will be watching progress towards our emissions targets and providing advice to the Government on future emissions budgets and areas for focus.

The clock on GHG emission compliance is ticking. The significant number for farmers contained in the Zero Carbon Act is the requirement to reduce emissions of biogenic methane by 24–47 percent below 2017 levels, by 2050 – a big ask. That’s a way off, but there’s a lot happening in the next few years to help us to get there.

After identifying a GHG number by the end of 2022, a pilot accounting system for reporting is meant to be in place the following year.

Fung said that while the price of emissions still isn’t known, understanding the amount of net emissions from each farm was an important start. Arriving at that figure is the tricky part.

Fung said the Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment (PCE) published a rough guide in 2016 for sheep and cattle. Based on these calculations, 100 deer would produce 69t of CO₂ equivalent per year (methane and nitrous oxide), requiring 11 hectares of native forest to soak it up. Fung cautioned that different GHGs (long vs. short-lived) will be calculated separately under HWEN.

HWEN has evaluated various tools for estimating emissions in different farm systems. The study incorporated one Southland

deer farm and three of the tools evaluated were usable for this: Farmax, OverseerFM and a Ministry for the Environment (MfE) spreadsheet. They have differing estimates for emissions, with OverseerFM setting the highest numbers. Fung suggested that some of the variation might be down to “operator error” and agreed these do create some issues.

Beef + Lamb NZ’s soon-to-be released GHG calculator tool will be able to be compared with these tools.

Some farmers would already have an OverseerFM-derived GHG number after doing required freshwater compliance work. “If you have, then job done,” Fung said. He said Overseer was the “gold standard” but required a lot of inputs, often by a consultant or company rep. Some good management practices could also be included in the calculations. The program does require an annual licence fee.

Farmax also costs money, requires a consultant and includes budgeting and financial analysis. The MfE tool was free but also very basic. It had just three inputs (kg fertiliser, land area and stock numbers) and no adjustments for good management practices or increased productivity.



Pastures and soil carbon won’t be included in GHG calculations, but woody vegetation can be.

DINZ had commissioned its own study on emissions profiles for four different types of deer farm in 2019, using Overseer. These showed that the farms were capable of offsetting between 7–62 percent of their emissions and all had lower emissions than the Southland deer farm used in the MfE study. However the calculations were “real world” rather than using the more restrictive definitions for carbon offsets allowed in the ETS.

Fung said it is possible to reduce emissions, but the options for this without sacrificing production are very limited. “There are few mitigation options other than producing more velvet and venison from less feed – not easy!”

There is some scope to offset emissions using woody vegetation, he said.

Fung said the four case study farms would be revisited and the four tools available (Farmax, Overseer, MfE spreadsheet and

continued on page 21

Confronting winter grazing challenges

After distressing images of Southland cows in deep mud were published in 2019, activists demanded **Rob Phillips** resign. But the Environment Southland chief executive wasn't about to throw in the towel.

SPEAKING AT THE deer industry conference, Phillips was frank about the region's environmental challenges. While Fiordland's water quality was "fantastic" the lower catchments in other parts of Southland weren't in such good shape, he said. The region was great at growing grass but had long winters and sediment issues.



Environment Southland chief executive Rob Phillips: Pleased to see farmers stepping up.

This came to a head in 2019 when activists took drone footage after a bad winter storm. While he agreed the images they published were confronting, Phillips wasn't about to walk away. And as the Minister of Agriculture kicked things off with a Winter Grazing Taskforce and then the Winter Grazing Action Group, Environment Southland did 95 fly-overs. They found eight non-compliances and mounted three successful prosecutions.

Things have improved since then, and Phillips said it was good to see farmers stepping up and being part

of the conversation with the council and Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). Fly-overs in 2020 showed widespread uptake of good management practices. While 19 farms were followed up, there were no prosecutions. The good planning and coordination between organisations was continuing this year.

Like most farmers, Phillips wasn't impressed with all of the Government's intensive winter grazing rules. They called a hui and established an advisory group to show what had been done and included a Fish & Game representative. The group's recommendations to the Government have been well received by the Ministers for the Environment and Primary Industries. Having someone from Fish & Game was key to the success of the talks: "He understood the science."

Phillips said the 12-month delay in implementing winter grazing rules was a good outcome and gave time to show what could be achieved. He commended MPI's winter grazing module (see page 39) as a resource for farmers.

Lindsay Burton is independent chair of the Winter Grazing Action Group, a 15-member group established early last year to implement the recommendations of the Winter Grazing Taskforce. The deer industry is represented through DINZ producer manager Tony Pearse.



Winter grazing practices are under scrutiny.

Burton said winter grazing is a national issue, not just Southland's, and that it is a system problem, not a farmer problem. It had to be viewed from a welfare as well as an environmental perspective, he said.

New welfare legislation in 2017 recognised animal sentience and its experience of its environment, so this had to be taken into account in new rules. The seven expected outcomes of the action group are:

1. We ensure our animals give birth in the right environment [not so applicable to deer for winter grazing]
2. We are prepared for all weather [this needs to be documented]
3. Our animals can easily access acceptable drinking water [a muddy puddle doesn't count]
4. We plan for successful winter feeding
5. Our animals can lie down comfortably
6. We work together to provide care to our animals during winter
7. We find opportunities to improve.

Burton said that in addition to Southland, the highest-risk areas for winter grazing were Canterbury, Otago and the central North Island.

He conceded that expectations such as those above aren't always communicated well to graziers. "Solutions shouldn't be devised in Wellington – they need to come from farmers." ■



Lindsay Burton: It's a national issue, not just Southland's.

Brave new world of co-innovation

How would you like your science served up? That was one of the key questions to be asked in a co-presentation by newly appointed DINZ science and policy manager Emil Murphy (see profile on page 42) and AgResearch scientist Jamie Ward, who runs the Deer Science for Success (S4S) Research Programme at Invermay.

THE PAIR REMINDED attendees that the long-standing DEEResearch and VARNZ models for research had been dissolved and deer industry science investment was now based around a new co-innovation model. This is focused in four areas: on-farm, post-farm, environment, and improved breeding. All of these areas can interact. Crucially all deer farming science is together under a single umbrella throughout the value chain. This is viewed as a major improvement as venison and velvet science have been separated for around quarter of a century.

The co-innovation operates with four innovation steering groups involving DINZ and AgResearch co-chairs and four-to-six industry representatives to consider science investment requirements and priorities using a problem focus. Ward said the connections and reporting between the groups were still being developed. One of the most crucial issues was how the science is shared – a perennial head scratcher.

These innovation steering groups will ‘keep it real’ and consider implementation, and communication of the science at the beginning of the innovation process to ensure that positive scientific outcomes and discoveries will deliver the benefits and impacts to the industry that they should.

Ward said the concept of co-innovation was hardly new to the deer industry, and innovation certainly is not, but like a shark in the ocean it needed to keep moving forward to stay alive.

The new research model was more flexible than the previous one. For example, a research project will be monitored through its life to check that it was still on track to achieve its objectives. “If necessary a project can change direction – we don’t need to wait until it’s completed.”

The whole programme was still in its own innovation phase, with ideas being generated and assessed. Murphy noted that the science shouldn’t be too formalised or process driven. “Sometimes the crazy ideas can be the best ones.”

That said, published papers are included as outputs where feasible so that the science is validated and recognised.

Ward explained that there’s some overlap with the former deer science models with some long-term projects such as the hill and high-country waterways starting under one system and finishing under the new regime. Previously velvet and non-velvet programmes tended to be ring-fenced but that won’t continue. He said the real co-innovation will start to kick in once a cycle of research programmes had been completed and the innovation steering groups had learnt how to interact and work together. It couldn’t be forced and the interactions needed to be genuine.

In the meantime, Murphy said, science providers needed to know from farmers and marketers what they wanted. “What’s concerning you about your farm, the environment, the markets and so on?”

Ward said there are currently 18 separate deer science projects under way. Three or four of these are at the initial “learning phase” where the work is scoped. The biggest was the six-year, \$400,000 hill and high-country waterways project. More than 40 people were involved in providing the science for these projects, although not all at the same time. A key goal of the Deer S4S programme is to increase the amount of research investment for the deer industry and new opportunities to leverage research value for the industry will be explored to maximise industry science spend. ■



Co-innovation at work: Emil Murphy (left) and Jamie Ward co-present during the science session.

GHG: continued

the upcoming Beef + Lamb tool) would be run over them. “That will give us a better idea of cost effectiveness and strengths and weaknesses of the tools, rather than relying on that single Southland deer farm.”

He said DINZ was committed to helping farmers know their number, through uptake of the Natural Knowledge Project (see page 27), Deer Industry Environment Groups, workshops, Advance Parties and a link to Beef + Lamb NZ activities.

“Please let us know how we can help you.”

Some useful points cropped up during Q+A:

- Pasture can’t be included in carbon sequestration calculations

because it goes straight back into the atmosphere via the animal as methane.

- It is intended that revenue from emissions under HWEN will be used directly to help support activities to either offset or reduce on-farm emissions.
- HWEN is developing policy that won’t over-incentivise large-scale pine plantings. It will seek a good balance with native plantings.
- Soil carbon is not included in calculations at this stage because it is so variable and is expensive to measure. Soil releases carbon in drought or through erosion. ■

Prizes! Silent auction!

If you came along to the conference you had pretty good odds in the various prize draws, thanks to the generosity of our sponsors. Here's who won/bought what.

Score the antlers

Sam Bishop, who guessed 450, won a prize of venison for best guess of the antler score for the head provided by Richard and Sarah Burdon atop this spectacular deer sculpture pictured at right (by Metalworks Wanaka).



Geraldine ITM

First-time main sponsor Geraldine ITM managing director Jason Leary has a long fascination with deer and his business serves some big customers in the area, such as Northbank Station, Rupert Red Deer and Regan and Ange Blair among others. "They've supported our business so I'm keen to support you." He said Bayonet, Tornado and Stuart Timber had also been very supportive.



Sponsors and winners of Bayonet netting in the prize draw, from left: Jason Leary (Geraldine ITM), Andrew Fraser, Marcus White (Bayonet), Bruce Allan, Rebecca Stevens and Adam Waite.



Sponsors and winners of Heavy Haldon Gates by Tornado from left: Jason Leary (Geraldine ITM), Paddy Boyd (yes, the coincidental "Haldon" connection was noted!), Lorna Humm, Tony Pearse and Roger Preston.



Datamars Trutest XRS2 stick reader prize draw: Lorna "Lucky" Humm, Mt Somers, pictured here with Martin Heanue of Datamars, picking up her second prize.

Gallagher TSi2 weigh scale and livestock manager: Won by Sam Martin in silent auction with proceeds going to the conference. ■

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Board Q+A session

DINZ Board members took the stage to field questions from attendees, plus questions submitted earlier.

How will you reverse the decline in the deer herd?

Mark Harris didn't offer any direct solutions, but said he was encouraged by initiatives being shown in markets by the venison companies (e.g. Project Moon-shot in China from Silver Fern; Force of Nature by Mountain River Venison). These were all fantastic initiatives and exactly the right response to challenges like Covid. The best time to innovate is when times are bad, Harris said.

Does the board appreciate the risks to the industry from environmental legislation and do we have the resources to respond?

Kris Orange said the constantly evolving requirements were frustrating, but DINZ was collaborating closely with people like Beef + Lamb NZ to stretch our resources further. He urged everyone to complete their Farm Environment Plans – 60 percent had already done so. It was always better to be inside the tent on initiatives like He Waka Eke Noa. The cost of mitigations like deer fencing was a burden, but he was excited about innovations like virtual fencing.

How well placed is the deer industry to deal with proposed greenhouse gas (GHG) targets?

Nigel Jones said we needed to look at all parts of the value chain with regard to GHGs, not just on farms. He said we need good generic systems for calculating GHG emissions but deer mitigations could be quite different than what's needed for sheep and cattle. "We are only one of 16 partners in He Waka Eke Noa and we need to step up and show the Climate Change Commission we're on top of it in terms of practical mitigations."

How does the board get its feedback from grassroots level?

Tony Cochrane said five of the eight board members were involved in deer farming and farmer concerns were addressed in general business segments of the meetings. Board members also visited regions to consult directly with deer farmers, most recently in South Canterbury.

P2P spent five years targeting foodservice in Europe and is now targeting retail in North America. What was the benefit of the European work?

Gerard Hickey said the benefits worked on three levels: camaraderie and collaboration between the five marketers; it drove summer demand of chilled venison; and it drove sales of chilled venison up by about 100 tonnes.

What's the plan for a successor to the successful P2P Advance Parties?

William Oliver said the board had committed significant reserves and increased the levy to support the current programme. The board supported continuation in some form. For his own two farms, P2P had added considerable value.

With OSPRI phasing out testing for low-risk areas, is the board reassured that vector control will be adequately funded to stop Tb creeping back?

Ian Walker said he supported reduced testing where appropriate as long as risks were understood. This included what was happening on neighbouring farms and in feral animals. The Hawke's Bay outbreak was a flare-up of an infection smouldering there since the late 1990s and OSPRI had fallen short with its vector control.

DINZ board observer Amy Watts, the first woman to be involved with the board, commented on her role

"I got told [I was appointed] because I had hair and wasn't a middle-aged male," Watts joked. She started work as a vet in Southland before moving north. "I've always loved working with deer and deer farmers," she said. Watts is also chair of the NZ Veterinary Association deer branch and is enjoying the chance to see industry governance first hand. "It's an awesome experience." *Is the industry going to rethink its position on GMO technology in light of environmental challenges and its potential to help with emissions mitigation?*

DINZ CEO **Innes Moffat** said GM pastures weren't available in New Zealand, but DINZ's position was that no technology should be ruled out if it proved efficacious and is acceptable to markets. The Cervena standard for non-GM feeds had been reviewed and a majority wanted the standard retained.

Is there a proper balance between velvet and venison levies in terms of how they are spent?

Walker said the DINZ executive put up a budget each year, covering operational costs as well as funding for promotion. The levy levels were never designed to generate a surplus to cover rainy days. **Innes Moffat** said the total levy take was 45 percent from velvet and 55 percent venison and expenditure broadly reflected that breakdown. Over the next five years the velvet contribution was likely to keep rising in relation to venison, and allocation would change to reflect this. **Kris Orange** said that as venison and levy takes became more equal, the current board allocation of three venison marketer seats to one velvet seat might need reconsidering. ■



Board members introduced by DINZ chair Ian Walker (left) fielded questions from attendees.

Awards dinner: A big night in

There was a time when the industry awards were fitted around a headline entertainment act at the annual conference dinner. These days the awards *are* the entertainment and also a much-valued opportunity to honour the industry's achievers. This year's awards dinner was generously sponsored by Alliance Group.

MSD Animal Health Photographic Awards

These awards have gone from strength to strength over the past 20 years. A near-record 87 photos were entered this year, from 28 individuals. The judges never have an easy task and this year was no exception. There was a great range of imaginative shots on a wide range of themes from the heart-warming to the humorous and heroic. Once again we've added to our store of images to help promote the industry to the world.



Third place: "Scratch that itch" by Richard Hilson.



Second place: "Boys at play" by Jessica McKenzie

People's choice: "Steamy weaners" by Mia Birt.

Highly commended entries were received from: Denise Pawsey, Jenny McMurdo, Sandra Stevens and from our overall winner, Ian Buunk.



First place: "Who's the boss" by Ian Buunk.

To see the full gallery of entrants: <https://deerindustryofnz.pixieset.com/2021deerindustryphotocomp/>

Our thanks to all entrants and to MSD Animal Health for their ongoing support for the awards.

Matuschka Award

Now established for a quarter-century, this award was conceived and presented to the NZDFA by Murray and Barbara Matuschka in 1996. It acknowledges the contribution of a deer farmer or deer farming entity who or which has made a significant ongoing or lifetime of contribution to deer farming and the NZDFA in particular at branch level. The award recognises the grass roots farmer and unsung contributor to local area activities, functions and core spirit of deer farming. It was not awarded in 2020 due to Covid.

This year's winners were **Ian and Dianne Bristow**, whose contributions to the industry and their local deer farming community go back decades. The couple, who got together in the 1990s after each losing their partners in tragic circumstances, have for many years provided the unofficial home base for the Kaipara branch, which they've served since 1979, at their Pinewood Deer Farm.

Both have a strong connection with fallow deer going back many years and were driving forces behind the NZ Fallow Deer Society, which has since gifted its residual funds to the Ian Speirs Memorial Trust.

Ian's background began in the industry as a stock agent, buying and selling red and fallow deer. Di's earliest connection with the industry started in the 1970s when she and her first husband Malcolm set up a small game park before acquiring a larger farm

featuring red breeding and velvetting and fallow trophy.

Both have been strong supporters of velvet competitions and NZDFA events over the years.

Dianne and Ian entertained the audience with a quick recap on their long deer farming careers. "This is quite overwhelming for us," Ian said. "Fallow are Di's passion – we're forever grateful for what those deer have done for us." He said Kaipara was a small but dedicated branch. "Thank you. We are both very humbled."



Ian and Dianne Bristow, winners of the 2021 Matuschka Award.

Deer Industry Environment Awards

It was an "on" year for the biennial awards, which featured eight entries, all of high quality. Chief judge Janet Gregory said the gaps between the entrants were miniscule and all were great exemplars for the rest of the industry. The full results and judges' comments are featured in the separate brochure which accompanies this mailing of *Deer Industry News*, so we will record the basic results here.

Gregory said the standards had kept increasing since she was first involved as a judge 15 years ago. "All entrants are leaders in the industry, show great stewardship and passion for the land and industry and support for their local communities."

SP Corporation & Dr. Gyong Jai Lee Award for leading, environmentally sustainable velvet farming: **Grant and Sally Charteris Forest Road Farm, Hawke's Bay**

Duncan New Zealand Ltd Award for demonstrating forward thinking and innovative farm practices while operating their business within a demanding environment: **John and Mel Somerville Arawata Deer Farm, Southland**

Gallagher Technology and Innovation Award for excellent utilisation of farming technologies to improve on-farm productivity and manage resources: **William & Karen Oliver, Three Rivers, King Country Mike Ferrier, Manager**

First Light Foods Ltd Award for total commitment to farming sustainably with a strong customer focus: **Goudies Station, Pāmu, Bay of Plenty: Tim Bowron, Manager and Chris Smith, Deer Manager**

NZ Landcare Trust Award for excellence in sustainable deer farming through action on the ground: **Andrew and Pam Peters, Balquhidder, Taihape**

NZDFA Next Generation Award for outstanding performance across environmental, financial and social aspects of the business: **Sophie and Heather Atkinson, Atkinson Family Trust, Wharerata Farm, Wairarapa**

Premier Award: The Elworthy Environmental Award: Grant and Sally Charteris Forest Road Farm, Hawke's Bay, sponsored by SP Corporation and Dr Gyong Jai Lee

The judges also acknowledged the high standards shown by the remaining entrants: **Tony, Michelle and Kate Roberts, Maitland, Southland** and **John and Mary Falconer, Ranfurly, Otago**



Premier Elworthy Award winners Grant and Sally Charteris with DINZ chair, Ian Walker (left).

Deer Industry Award

This is always a highlight for the evening and the citations for this year's winner, **John Tacon** were as fulsome as they were well-deserved. Accolades and endorsements supporting his nomination were received from right across the industry, leaders past and present and, significantly, from senior government officials and vets who have long held John in such high regard.

We can't even begin to do justice to those comments here, but these samples will give a flavour of John's contribution and why the announcement filled the Bill Richardson World of Transport (a highly appropriate venue for John!) with such loud applause.

From the early 1980s, John owned and operated a deer transport business based out of Hokitika, specialising in the transport of feral deer and during the expansion phase of the industry. In those days, deer were worth \$1,200-\$3,000 a head with individual stags considerably more.

John's reputation, quiet and calm approach, innate knowledge of deer behaviour, commitment to service and his unruffled approach to stock found him well respected. He was considered among the best of operators in this emerging specialist transport business.

His leadership for 30 years in this area is the stuff of legends. John's style is unassuming but firm and clear.

– Tony Pearse, DINZ producer manager

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Awards: continued

John is one of the fathers of quality assurance programmes in New Zealand agriculture, and while the wheel takes time to turn again, the widespread adoption of on-farm quality assurance is based on the pioneering work led by JT in conjunction with the DFA and processing companies.

He was the DINZ lead on the implementation of the velvet removal Regulated Control Scheme and has recently assumed a bigger role in the implementation of VelTrak. Both are substantial changes to the way we do business and due to John's consultative and practical approach are seen as positive changes for the deer industry.

– Innes Moffat, DINZ chief executive

In the complex arena of animal welfare and transport especially, John is a legend and a very worthy, albeit well overdue, nominee for deer industry recognition.

– Dr Mark Fisher (former MPI Animal Welfare Team Manager and Principal Adviser)

[His] proactive, inclusive, and practical approach to animal welfare should be an example to all other farming industries. John Tacon deserves a good share of the praise for that outcome. His ability to relate to all sectors of the industry and his passion to do the right thing have been the glue that has kept all the projects he is involved with on track.

– Les Gainsford, MPI Verification Services

In response, John said he was proud and honoured. "I've got the best job in the world, working with deer and livestock transport. I've been so proud to work in the deer industry and alongside such



John Tacon, recipient of the 2021 Deer Industry Award.

a fantastic, qualified and amazing group of people, first at the GIB and now at DINZ. I'd like to thank them and all the incredible people I've worked with, but especially I'd like to thank my darling wife Judy for her support, her believing in what I do, and putting up with me being away so much."

The award is sponsored by Porter Holdings, *Countrywide* magazine and NZDFA.

• After his long and distinguished career helping keep the deer industry's welfare and quality standards on track, John is retiring from full-time employment with DINZ from 30 July. ■

“Great yarns” in upcoming account of first fifty years

Agricultural journalist and author Lynda Gray gave conference goers a sneak preview of her upcoming book, *Hindsight: 50 years of deer farming in New Zealand*.

GRAY HAD HOPED the book would be printed in time for the conference but, as with so many projects, production has been delayed by supply chain issues and it's now expected to be available in late September.

She said the project, which she announced five years ago, was bigger than she'd imagined and involved a deep dive into industry records along with more than 100 interviews of people involved in the past fifty years of deer farming. "I loved hearing the stories – deer farmers are never short of an opinion!"

The book was divided into five parts: "A flying start 1970–1984" recounts the adrenalin-filled early years. In "The business years 1985–1993" the book looks into the impact of Rogernomics and emergence of quality assurance and the trailblazing Cervena appellation. Part 3, "The Big Time 1994–2000", covers a period of rapid growth, new players, "argy-bargy" and unsettled times for industry structures. It was also the time for big performance projects like DeerSouth.

Part 4, "A changed landscape" covers 2001–2010 when the industry was enduring a rough time, regrouping after a period of volatility. Innovations like Focus Farms also emerged in this era.

The fifth part, "The New Wave, 2011–" looks at innovations like Next Generation, P2P and deer milking. It finishes with a peek into the future and the next 50 years.

The project has been supported by NZDFA, PGGWrightson, Mountain River Venison, Alliance Group, First Light, Provelco and Jeff Pearse.

"Buy the book! There are some great yarns!" Gray concluded.

To pre-order a copy, contact Lynda Gray: lyndagray9393@gmail.com ■



Lynda Gray previews her upcoming book (inset), a project that's dominated her time for the past five years. It will be available from late September.

Branch chairs check in

Ahead of the main conference in Invercargill last month, NZDFA branch chairs met to tease out a few issues and talk to stakeholders. This gathering is a useful catchup ahead of the main branch chairs' conference in October.

ONGOING SOFT VENISON prices were top of mind for many and branch chairs were concerned that venison was being overtaken by beef and lamb. DINZ venison marketing manager Nick Taylor and chief executive Innes Moffat shared some market insights.

Moffat said Chinese demand for beef and lamb was supporting those prices, but venison wasn't feeling the same tail winds thanks partly to ongoing sluggish European economies. That said, there had been a small uptick in the schedule and he suggested prices could reach pre-Covid levels within a year.

Taylor said venison product was still moving, and while some was still in freezers ahead of the next game season, this wasn't expected to affect the chilled market too much. Confidence was returning and, in Germany, restaurants had received good government support through their lockdowns.

Moffat said a lot of manufacturing-grade venison goes to China and the United States, which takes some pressure off the higher-value cuts going to Europe. At the same time, there had been some diversification in Europe too, and he expected to see more venison being switched away from foodservice and into retail outlets such as the Aldi chain.

A number of people commented on logistical and supply chain issues affecting the meat trade at present.

DINZ manager, markets Rhys Griffiths said there were still market access issues into China for deer bones and co-products. A couple of companies were looking to get some value-added products into that market but they needed listing by the Chinese authorities first.

He said Taiwan and Vietnam both had potential for deer co-products through the traditional Chinese medicine market.

OSPRI presentation

Vivienne Larsen, OSPRI's general manager for service delivery in the lower South Island, fielded questions from branch chairs.

They were unimpressed by the prospect of double-tagging with NAIT tags to shore up traceability if one tag should be lost. The proposal for double-tagging is out for consultation at present. Claire Parkes (Nelson) noted tag retention is not a big issue for younger animals. "Deer have only two ears, but now we might have to use two NAIT tags and one visual tag," she said.

Steve Borland (Waipa) was more blunt. "NAIT was forced on us. We were never 'partners'. We should have used high-frequency tags so we could store more information, but people in Wellington just don't understand!"

Executive committee chair John Somerville noted there were a lot of "ghost" animals in the system thanks to poor quality tags going missing.

"Eighty percent of deer make only one trip in their lives – to the works. That's a lot less than dairy cows. We don't need NAIT to tell us what farm an animal has come from if there's a Tb outbreak. It's a cost, not a benefit."



Vivienne Larsen acknowledged the challenges being faced with the Hawke's Bay outbreak.

Larsen noted that the market access underpinned by NAIT could probably be seen as a benefit, adding that the double-tagging proposal had come up after discussion with the wider industry.

Sean de Lacy (Taihape-Ruapehu) echoed many in the room when he said the stock identification needs of deer and dairy cows were very different. He conceded things had improved in NAIT after the recent overhaul, "but it's too soon to start changing things again". He noted that often when there's a movement of weaners from a breeding unit to a finishing unit, both have the same owner anyway. Others pointed out that with exemptions in place for trophy and fallow deer, the system is already porous.

Larsen acknowledged the issues OSPRI was facing dealing with the stubborn Tb outbreak in Hawke's Bay and said \$20m had been committed to that hotspot over the next 5 years. The wildlife source of the infection appeared to have travelled up to 20km from its base, she said.

"We've reached a crucial stage in the progress towards eliminating Tb by 2026. The remaining [infected] herds are in areas with challenging terrain or there's a long history of infection."

Richard Currie (Otago) commented that MPI was handing out fines to farmers for NAIT violations "like ice creams", but NAIT was pussyfooting around landowners who refused to cooperate with vector control operations. Larsen said OSPRI and the Department of Conservation were working hard to find a solution. "We don't want this to get bogged down in the courts."

Fancy a free Farm Environment Plan?

If you've already paid for consultancy assistance to put together a Farm Environment Plan (FEP), you'll know it doesn't come cheap. But if you haven't done an FEP yet – or your current one needs an update – then there's an opportunity to get one done free.

continued on page 28

Branch chairs: continued

The offer comes courtesy of the Natural Knowledge Project, being funded to the tune of \$16.4m through the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). Of this, \$1.2m has been allocated to get between 120–150 deer farms included.

MPI is funding up to 3,500 farms in total to get an Overseer® exercise done, produce a set of greenhouse gas numbers for the property, and get an FEP drawn up. The data from these farms will be anonymised and used by MPI as real-world data to inform ongoing policy work. It will also be made available to DINZ, and could be used as a base for valuable longitudinal studies showing the impact of environmental mitigations over time.

Considering this could normally cost north of \$10,000 to get commissioned privately, it's a useful offer.

Environment consultant Emma Buchanan, who works with the P2P programme's Deer Industry Environment Groups, is helping coordinate the recruitment of deer farms for the Natural Knowledge Project.

DINZ farm performance manager Phil McKenzie said the ideal candidates from the deer industry might be the sceptics who have been less inclined to get their FEPs done so far – rather than the “worried well” who are already onto it.

The areas will be weighted towards the distribution of deer farms through the country, with a target of 45 in the North Island and 105 in the South Island. “This is a good deal,” McKenzie said. “In areas where they already have to get an FEP done, here's an opportunity to have it done free.”

VelTrak update

DINZ quality assurance manager John Tacon told branch chairs that deer farmers had made a good start getting registered on VelTrak, with several hundred already on the system. He said new farms also needed to get registered, even if sheds hadn't been built yet.

Innes Moffat said the handful of farmers who don't have email addresses or internet access would be accommodated to make sure they were in the VelTrak system, probably by working through their vet.

He promised deer farmers that VelTrak would be “so much simpler than NAIT”.

Rhys Griffiths said the process for handling velvet being entered into competitions would be essentially unchanged under VelTrak. He said the 4-hour limit for leaving velvet out of a freezer under the Regulated Control Scheme was designed with velvet competitions in mind. He suggested competition organisers use a sheet to record the tags of velvet entered into a competition – a \$100 barcode scanner could be used to record these. “You do have to have a simple system in place to record what velvet has been there.”

When the velvet was eventually sold it would be officially scanned in by the velvet buyer.

Future of P2P

DINZ farm performance manager, Phil McKenzie said it was important to get buy-in and support from NZDFA as DINZ looks to secure future funding for a “P2P Mark 2” after P2P funding finishes in September 2022. He said the next iteration of P2P could look different – for example, how might we integrate further across the existing theme groups? It was also important to engage a wide

group of deer farmers as part of building what we all want P2P to become and even involve more farmers beyond the 500 or so involved to date.

All options were up for consideration at present, but McKenzie said MPI recognised the industry's good networks, farmer involvement and desire to continue the good work started under P2P.

Executive committee member Mark McCoard suggested a shift away from a pure production focus to helping farmers deal with compliance might be one way forward. John Somerville said the success of P2P Advance Parties had detracted from DFA activities in some areas and this should be avoided.

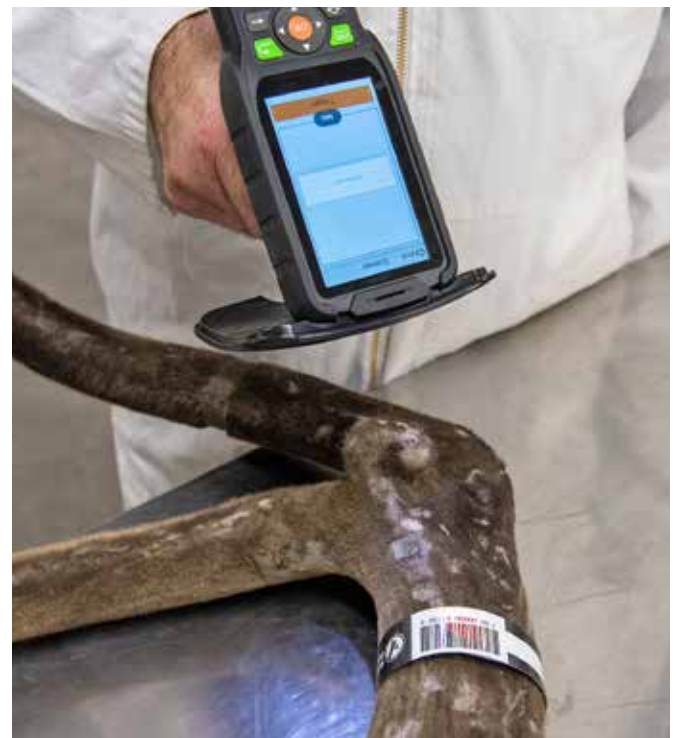
It was noted that up to 60 percent of the Red Meat Profit Partnership's Action Groups had elected to continue by self-funding after the Beef + Lamb funding ended this year.

Environment

Lindsay Fung, DINZ environmental stewardship manager, said deer farmers should be alert to the effects of government actions on their activities. He said knowing your greenhouse gas number is not a bad thing, as it does give farms a baseline cost for emissions.

There was plenty of discussion with the Government at present, for example on how to assess carbon storage, the status of exotics versus natives, wetlands and so on. The national policy statement on indigenous biodiversity was currently “behind closed doors” and one to watch out for, he said. A section on significant natural areas (SNAs) was of concern. “We made strong recommendations on SNAs – what is a ‘permitted activity’ needs input from landowners.” He said some district councils' handling of SNAs had been “appalling”.

Overall, deer and other drystock farming already ticked a lot of environmental boxes on freshwater management and biodiversity, Fung said. ■



Velvet buyers/packhouses will be responsible for scanning VelTrak tags.

46th Annual General Meeting

The NZDFA returned to an in-person AGM at the Invercargill deer industry conference, following the lockdown-enforced online meeting in 2020.

THERE WAS A good turnout of members and procedural matters passed smoothly. The full narrative on the association's year to 31 March 2021 can be found in the annual report at: <https://www.deernz.org/publications>



NZDFA executive committee chair John Somerville presents his report to the AGM.

Report seconded

Chair **John Somerville** delivered a summarised version of his report (see annual report for full version). Seconding the report, former NZDFA chair **David Stevens** made the following observations (these are summarised):

“It was a challenging year in 2020/21 and will be that way until we get vaccinated and get back to a semblance of pre-Covid life.

“For venison it's been a battle. It depends on the restaurant trade in Europe and the United States. Exporters are to be commended for [finding new ways of] reaching those markets through online sales, different cuts and online cooking demonstrations to name a few. These initiatives will put the industry in a stronger position than before the Covid outbreak.

“Velvet has been okay. Although prices were back about 15 percent on the previous season, farmers were grateful for the prices they received. It's great to see more product moving



David Stevens seconds the chair's annual report.

into healthy functional foods in Korea. I must commend the velvet companies and DINZ for their initiative to develop this market in China. This will be a game changer.

“Thanks to the executive committee, the NVSB and DFA branches, the Regulated Control Scheme buy-in and shed audits have gone extremely well. This and VelTrak will underpin the standards and protect the integrity of New Zealand velvet in the market.

“It's been disappointing to see a drop in DFA membership. Often the good work by DFA goes unnoticed. We have as many challenges today as we did 45 years ago. Today they are different challenges: greenhouse gases, the environment and animal welfare. Given the increased use of prosecution we need a strong NZDFA. These issues provide an opportunity to connect with all deer farmers and convince them of the benefits of DFA membership.

“The Next Generation conference is a great initiative and provides a good pathway to involvement and leadership as well as an understanding of the industry.

“As P2P funding ends I support branches incorporating the Advance Party functions into their activities. We must ensure the DFA stays connected with new initiatives.

“The branch chairs and new faces meeting in Wellington was a highlight and gives chairs a chance to meet face to face with DINZ executives and board members. The opportunity to connect with other branch chairs is also invaluable.

“Environmental regulation is our number one issue. The question is, how robust will a Farm Environment Plan need to be, if it can be used in place of a consent. Then there is the ‘know your greenhouse gas number’ by the end of next year. The NZDFA needs to champion the uptake of this.

“Thank you Lindsay [Fung] and John [Somerville] for your work on this. It's important the DFA has a seat at the table.

“The Selection and Appointments Panel has five strong [DINZ board] candidates to consider. It's a shame there is only one vacancy. We continue to attract quality candidates – a reflection of our industry.

“The availability of DINZ staff to NZDFA and all deer farmers is appreciated.

“Congratulations to the executive committee and chair for all your hard work. There are big challenges ahead – not helped by the goalposts shifting. I second the report.”

Finance highlights

- Paid membership for the year to 31 March 2021 declined by 7 percent to 1,109.
- The succession planning programme has been concluded.
- NZDFA equity has increased by \$5,593.
- Holding SAP meetings and the 2020 AGM via Zoom call did reduce costs.

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AGM: continued

- The 2021/22 NZDFA budget is set to break even.
- No nationally funded projects are planned for this year.
- It's proposed that accounts for membership subs will now be emailed rather than posted, a potential saving of about \$2,500.

Board candidates

The five candidates for a producer position on the DINZ board were invited to present to the meeting. They will be interviewed by the Selection and Appointments Panel later this month and an appointment made by 1 July. Their comments (in brief) were as follows.

Mandy Bell: A lifelong interest in deer started in 1977 when, as a child, she attended New Zealand's first ever live deer auction. As a vet student she worked with fallow. She has a strong interest in genetics and values a holistic approach to animal health. Bell and husband Jerry have multiple business interests including deer farming and tourism and are passionate about farming sustainably and profitably. Bell, with Adrian Campbell, helped establish John's Management Ltd (now DeerPRO). She was also strongly involved in the establishment of the current P2P programme and chaired the advisory group, and helped establish the Deer Progeny Test, which underpinned many of today's breeding values.

Jacqueline Rowarth: She said science has never been so important. Rowarth has a PhD in nutrient cycling, done at Whatawhata research station, and has taught biological sciences. She has been involved in leadership and governance, for example with Crown research institutes and DairyNZ. Her involvement with deer is through her partner, vet and deer farmer Ian Scott. Rowarth said doing good science, good communication and an understanding of economics are priorities. It was important for the industry to understand its environmental metrics so it could respond to groups like Greenpeace. Marketing venison should focus on taste and convenience, and not be distracted by competition from synthetic proteins, she said.

Sarah Paterson: Qualified in law and politics, Paterson worked initially at MFAT. At the former Meat & Wool NZ she was a trade policy manager, seeking better outcomes for farmers. She's also worked for Fonterra in Europe on market access issues, working with industry and global organisations. Climate change and "food miles" were a big issue then. In New Zealand she worked in Fonterra's trade, environment policy and government relations teams and is now an independent consultant. She still has a strong primary industry focus. Paterson enjoys working with the sector and farmers. She can offer experience in trade policy, strategic work, government relations and pan-sector collaboration.

Martin Rupert: DINZ and other primary industry organisations are behind on climate change, Rupert said. While the Climate Change Commission wanted a 47 percent drop in methane emissions by 2050, this didn't account for the importance of food production, he said. DINZ needed to engage the right people to work in the sector's interests. He argued that livestock production is carbon neutral and quoted figures to support this. MPs sitting on the select committee for the Zero Carbon Bill had "no idea", he said. "Sure, let's reduce methane emissions, but let's not choke our industry. Taxing farmers [for emissions] after 2025 will leave them behind."

Simon Wright: He is managing director and a shareholder

of Fairlight Station Ltd, which includes Fairlight Station and Forest Creek Station. These incorporate 36,000 stock units and 10 staff. Wright is also a director of Fairlight Foundation, which supports young women advancing in agriculture careers. He's chaired the Southland Advance Party, completed an Institute of Directors course and spent 17 years in the deer industry, which was poised for big strides in genetics. Like many others, he sees environment as the main challenge for the industry. All options, including genetic technologies, should be on the table, he said. The primary sector needed to unite and take a holistic approach to its challenges.

Appointments

Justin Stevens and **Mark McCoard** were re-elected to the NZDFA Executive Committee unopposed. **Donald Whyte** and **Steve Borland** were returned unopposed to the Selection and Appointments Panel.

A word from OSPRI

Vivienne Larsen, who addressed branch chairs the previous day, spoke to the AGM for OSPRI. She explained OSPRI was moving from a centralised structure to three regional teams (North Island, Upper South and Lower South). They had built capability with access to more veterinary and epidemiological skills and farmer-facing roles had increased from four to 14.

The goal of Tb freedom in cattle and deer herds by 2026 was still on track, she said. "There are still a lot of challenges though."

Grant Charteris (Hawke's Bay) interjected that iwi intransigence over use of 1080 on their land was holding up progress against the outbreak there. Larsen acknowledged that getting the best tools for the job accepted was challenging for all.

She said there were nine high-focus areas for vector control at present and OSPRI was able to reallocate resources from lower-risk areas. Epidemiologists were using genetics to trace the sources of infection, she added.

In Hawke's Bay, farm management issues such as access to feed, were adding complications to disease management.

There was a fair bit of dissatisfaction expressed from the floor and farmers seem no longer impressed that infected herd numbers have fallen from over 1,700 in the 1990s to a few dozen today – it's old news now. Larsen suggested the best place to air concerns was through committee chairs and the stakeholders' council. She reiterated that a changing focus towards farmers was the correct one.

Larsen said OSPRI had reviewed its traceability programme. There was opportunity for third-party systems like dairy's MINDA to interact with NAIT, she said. Overall, NAIT compliance was improving, with deer farmers more compliant than the national average.

One compliance issue was lifetime traceability, which was getting worse and was below 50 percent. This might be a system issue, not a farmer one, Larsen said. For example, not all tags were getting picked up at slaughter.

Work was also ongoing to improve the NAIT software so it worked better with other systems and was easier to use. A more holistic approach to education was also being taken. ■

Big Deer Tour back on the road

The Big Deer Tour was back on again in April after a Covid-enforced hiatus in 2020. Eight young undergraduates from a variety of fields enjoyed an immersive five-day tour of the industry around the South Island, going literally from pasture to plate.



The Big Deer Tourists stopped in at Deer Milking NZ's Lincoln Hills deer milking operation. Pictured with the group are Dan Hall, Lincoln Hills Farm Manager (far left) and Simon Wakefield, Deer Milking NZ (far right).

ALL ASPECTS WERE covered and no product groups were forgotten, as the group traversed farms, processors, marketing, cuisine, extension, research, environment, industry governance and more. Rob Aloe, DINZ P2P project manager, led the tour.

The tour started at Mountain River Venison in Rakaia, with visits also made to Provelco, Alpine Deer Group (co-products), Deer Milking NZ limited at Lincoln Hills, Duncan South NZ Venison in Mosgiel and Silver Fern Farms' headquarters in Dunedin (marketing).

The group went to several contrasting deer farm operations: Melior Venison, near Fairlie, Ben Dhu Station, Omarama, Northbank Station, Rakaia and Clachanburn Deer, Ranfurly.

DINZ staff contributed throughout the busy week. Tony Pearce gave an overview of the industry while Nick Taylor covered the venison experience alongside chef Emily Cross at ARA Institute of Canterbury. Rhys Griffiths introduced the velvet industry capped off with a Korean lunch hosted with Provelco's Ross Chambers.

Venison cuisine presented by Graham Brown was on offer at an evening function when the group was introduced to industry governance by DINZ directors and South Canterbury/North Otago DFA members.

Deer farmer Mandy Bell talked to the group about environmental stewardship, the Jobs for Nature programme and environmental challenges and opportunities facing deer farming.

Consultant Wayne Allan gave the Big Deer Tourists insights into consultancy and took them on a tour of Northbank Station.

The role of the Passion2Profit Advance party programme was explained by Abacusbio's Simon Glennie when the group visited Clachanburn Deer.

The last day focused on science at the AgResearch Invermay campus, where presentations were led by Jamie Ward (deer science programmes), Sharon McIntyre (Deer Select and genetics) and Solis Norton (DeerPRO, health and productivity information).

Zach Dewhurst is a third-year Massey University student studying towards and BSc majoring in agricultural science. He was

interested in learning about a different style of farming and the environment research that backs it. WAI Wanaka and AgResearch especially caught his eye. He would like to one day get involved on the research side with a focus on soils and plants, and reducing environmental impacts of deer farming.



Zach Dewhurst.

Izzy Hurst is studying for a Masters of Business in Global Management and Marketing at Lincoln University, with a special interest in supply chain management and marketing. In the case of deer she's keen to understand how the industry utilises supply chain transparency to stay competitive internationally. A highlight for her was the visits to Duncan NZ and Mountain River Venison, seeing the whole process. "The trip was really well organised."



Izzy Hurst.

Izzy was also very interested in the Asian markets for deer products and the untapped potential in China. "I was also really struck by the optimism and passion of deer farmers."

Amy Ashworth, who grew up on sheep, beef and deer farms, is in her final year at Massey University studying for a Bachelor in Agricultural Commerce. She's interested in how deer fit into farm systems and this tour was an "awesome opportunity" to learn more.



Amy Ashworth.

"I enjoyed visiting the stations to see how they run, and their different management systems, especially the visit to The Kowhais when we got into the shed with the deer. Attending the DFA meeting with the DINZ board was a great way to meet those in the industry and to see their passion, as well as how keen they are for the next generation to come through."

Amy was interested in the co-products side and impressed by how little of the deer is wasted. She'd like to work in the industry as a shepherd, or on the genetics side.

"The tour was an awesome opportunity and we got to observe so much. Everything was useful and we got to see the whole story of pasture to plate. I would recommend this tour to all students."

• This was the fourth Big Deer Tour, following tours in 2017, 2018 and 2019. They are produced as part of the Passion2Profit programme, a Primary Growth Partnership co-funded by DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries. ■

Vet students learn ropes of the deer industry

Sixteen final-year veterinary science students enjoyed a four-day immersion in all things deer from 24–27 May as part of their deer special interest topic week. *Deer Industry News* joined them on the final day, a visit in glorious weather to the property of velvet farmers Alex and Angela McIntyre, who farm at Ohingaiti on the banks of the Rangitikei River in the central North Island.

THE PROGRAMME WAS hosted by DINZ, the P2P programme, Taihape-Ruapehu branch of DFA and BJ Bowsher of Taihape Vets and the NZ Veterinary Association deer branch with additional sponsorship by Rabobank and First Light Venison. The deer component of Massey’s Bachelor of Veterinary Science is now led by veterinarian Stuart Bruère, who will be known to many in the deer industry, and accompanied the students.

The first two days of the programme featured presentations from DINZ staff with an industry overview plus segments on venison and velvet marketing, environment, DeerPRO, the National Velvetting Standards Body and the information available through Deer Hub. Bruère and Bowsher took care of the more vet-focused content. Before heading north from Massey, the group was hosted by Simon Wishnowsky of Venison Packers, Feilding on a visit to the plant.

On day three they called in to Waihi Pukawa Station, near Turangi, a major venison breeding and finishing operation where they were hosted by manager Colin Gates and kaumatua Wally Kingi.

Day four was the visit to the McIntyres’ 425 effective hectare property and velvetting operation. The family’s connection to this property covers two generations, and the Ohingaiti district four generations. Alex and Angela McIntyre said family and succession were central to their business. Their daughter Faith and a friend both work on the property and are doing Primary ITO courses.

There’s a total of 3,142 deer stock units, including just under 700 velvetting stags and 470 breeding hinds. The deer are complemented by about 600 ewes and 300 bulls, which graze with the deer.



Alex and Angela McIntyre with grandson Jaxon. The lucerne paddocks are on the flats in the background.



Veterinary students working on a feed budgeting exercise in one of the McIntyres’ kale paddocks.

It’s a mix of flats and hill with good pastures, about 12 hectares of lucerne on the river flats and extensive use of kale and turnips for winter feed to provide energy and conserve pasture. They are fed on breaks but fairly large ones of a week or so. The farm also uses maize and palm kernel at key times of the year.



“I got interested in deer through hunting, but hadn’t had much experience handling them. I’ve found you need to move with and not against them in the shed. I want to work with deer and will probably go into mixed practice.”

– Melissa Veltman

It's a productive velvet operation, growing from about 1.35 tonnes cut 10 years ago to just under 5 tonnes today. Main source of genetics is Alf Kinzett (Murchison) and some AI has been used recently to boost genetics. The McIntyres DNA their animals and have 20 years' worth of records.

Alex said they select for weight and style, although he said it's not always easy to get both. Any sire stag needs to be cutting twice its age in kilograms to be worthy, he said. Their best sires top 14kg. About half their two-year-olds cut over 3kg and the herd as a whole averages over 7kg including regrowth.

Of special interest to the vet students, naturally enough, was animal health. Angela said this was generally good, with the only regional issue being the sandstone country which is tough on teeth. Most stags are gone by age 11 after peaking about age 8. That said, they live a "long and happy life". Animals are vaccinated for yersinia, leptospirosis and clostridial disease. There are no foot problems and the deer are fine with concrete flooring in the shed.

The stags seem well settled and coexist happily in velvetting mobs of about 100 animals three years and older. Alex said the only feed pinch was in autumn and the stags were not eating a lot during the roar.

Grass grub is an issue and they use the deer to chew out pasture and trample the grubs to knock them back.

Body size is not a big consideration. Venison is very much a by-product, but culling stags at 2 years at least achieves a premium for the meat. Alex told the students that even smaller stags can "neck up" as heavy velvet grows, although antler growth – 250g a day of new bone – does take its toll.

Pre-rut weaning suits the pasture curves better than post-rut on this place. Angela said the fawns take a growth check at weaning, and receive a regular drench through to August, but on balance it's better to release the hinds from lactation to put on some condition before mating. Feed is cranked up before weaning to get the fawns used to pasture.



Velvetting stags at the McIntyres' property.

The lucerne is a "magic" resource and although it's not deer fenced the crop is cut and carried to them.

There's not a lot of work for the vet with deer on the property, although there is of course the annual work around velvetting and AI. Like most velvet farmers the McIntyres had to spend some money on their shed to meet RCS requirements but they see that as a good investment. ■



Rachael Foote (left) and Lee Rae with a ginkgo tree in the McIntyres' garden.

"I grew up on a deer and sheep farm in Marlborough. They're lovely peaceful animals and I'd love to work in a deer practice. I was really interested in the information about the Advance Parties and overseas marketing, especially for velvet. My uncle grows ginkgo trees and harvests the leaves for their extract which is used in traditional medicines for things like memory enhancement – not unlike velvet!"

– Rachael Foote

"I knew the velvet industry was important but I didn't realise it was so big! I'm Korean so I'm familiar with deer velvet and how it's used but I'd always thought it was mostly for older people – I didn't realise how much it's now used in younger markets. KGC is one of the most trusted companies in Korea and all families would have some of their products. I grew up in Auckland but I'm really keen to go into large animal practice."

– Lee Rae



Senior Massey lecturer Stuart Bruère (centre) uses a deer skull as an impromptu teaching aid.

We are hiring at Ardleigh Deer Farm!

<https://www.trademe.co.nz/Browse/Listing.aspx?id=3118757408>

Feel free to contact Donald or Ben Hudson at ardleighfarm@hotmail.com or message the Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/ardleighdeer>

Invercargill Technical Expo highlights

Many of those who made the trip to Invercargill for the deer industry conference last month stayed an extra day for the P2P Deer Farmers National Technical Workshop at the Ascot Park Hotel, hosted by DINZ and NZDFA. They were joined by a number of local Southland and Otago deer farmers taking advantage of free access to some good quality technical displays and workshops on their doorstep. We summarise a selection of the presentations.

Stopping sediment in its traps

Environment Southland's **David Moate** told attendees that Southland alone delivers 25 million tonnes of sediment into Foveaux Strait each year and 70 percent of this is generated by less than 10 rain events. While some sediment is a result of natural geological processes that build coastlines and is essentially sterile, this is topped up with sediment from farms, rich in organic matter. It smothers invertebrates and promotes nuisance algae in rivers, he said.

Not all the bad stuff comes from agriculture, he added. Urban-sourced sediments contain contaminants from brake linings, tyres and oil, for example. In the worst cases there were now "dead zones" in ocean environments.

Moate encouraged deer farmers to use sediment traps to capture the bulk of the sediment from their properties. "It doesn't matter if the trap dries out at times." He said well-designed detainment bunds can capture up to 80 percent of the sediments and nutrients in water. (In Southland, dams up to 4 metres high and containing up to 20,000m³ can be built unconsented.)

Even a simple "hole in the ground" sediment trap or series of staged ponds will help. It was also important to get stock out of gullies and create buffers with long grass to capture sediments. "They don't have to be big or expensive – but keep your deer out of them!"

Farm drain networks can also be part of the system if you add a series of sediment traps.

Winter grazing tips

Southland deer farmer John Somerville and Environment Advance Party facilitator Nicola McGrouther added some advice gleaned from the AP's experience, including:

- add buffers around gullies
- graze winter crops from the top down
- have a bad-weather plan and be ready to take animals off crop if needed
- use bigger breaks on steeper land
- use hay bales below critical source areas to slow down and trap sediment
- if possible keep an alternative dry area for animals to sit in
- budget more feed than you think you'll need
- consider housing deer in winter and taking feed to them.

(For more information see *Deer Industry News*, October 2020, page 23.)



Trade display area at the Invercargill technical workshop, held at the Ascot Park Hotel.

Big changes coming to Deer Select

Deer Select manager **Sharon McIntyre** previewed upcoming changes to the genetics recording system that will improve the way breeders and commercial deer farmers interact with the system.

Deer Select has always "piggybacked" on Sheep Improvement Ltd's (SIL's) base system, with the only expense to the deer industry being the adaptations of the software for deer breeding. Now the elderly Jade software platform is no longer viable and SIL will be transitioning to nProve, a completely new platform that's likely to come in next year. It will be far easier to use, with no need to trawl through pages of spreadsheets. Deer Select will be coming along for the ride and some of the new system should start to roll out later this year in time for the next sale season.

McIntyre said there will be several significant changes occurring with the changeover:

- **Cross-breed evaluation** (between red and elk/wapiti) will become a reality, meaning some breeding values (BVs) will be directly comparable (coming in this year).
- **The base year for indexes is being reset from 1995 to 2005** (coming in this year). McIntyre said this means some breeding value numbers will be lower but not by very much. That's because much of the genetic improvement we've seen has happened since 2005.
- The economic indexes showing the dollar value per animal born from maternal and terminal sires will be split out into several



Southland deer farmer Bruce Allan (standing) leads a workshop.

sub-indexes, through which buyers will be able to more easily see the balance an animal has across traits and drill down and find sires with the combination of traits (e.g. reproduction, growth, meat) that really work for them. This way they'll be able to find herds or even individual animals that suit their needs. They'll be able to do this using a nifty on-screen tool using sliders to select trait values. (The sub-indexes are likely to roll out next year.)

Also coming to Deer Select further down the track will be genomically enhanced BVs, where genetic tests will confirm an animal's genetic merit. This will be especially useful for traits that are expressed later in life, such as reproduction. "The BV will be based on the actual inheritance of a trait – it will no longer just be a 'mid-parent mean,'" McIntyre said.

There will be new reproduction BVs too, one for R2s/first fawners and one for mixed age hinds. These are provisionally titled FERT-2 and FERT-MA.

McIntyre acknowledged that there will generally be an overlap between growth traits for high-BV red deer and elk/wapiti when the cross-breed figures are available, but noted there is more to it than that. "Female progeny of elk/wapiti sires get to slaughter weights faster than those of red sires."

In conclusion, McIntyre reminded attendees of the consequences of their decisions. "The effects of a sire in your

herd will be around for 10 or 12 years. No-one wants 10–12 years of ordinary. Using Deer Select will help you lock in genuine and lasting genetic improvement."

Proof in the field

In a later workshop it was apparent that not all are on board the genetic improvement train just yet. "Nah, it's just a hobby for grandad!" was one response to a question about who uses BVs when choosing sires. Fortunately many more are interested. Sharon McIntyre said the publication of BVs in sale catalogues is starting to be mirrored by the prices achieved for some sires.

The BV proof exercise (where the effects of growth BVs were tested on three commercial farms) was a great way to show that there is a measurable commercial benefit from investing in high-BV sires in a real-world situation, McIntyre said. She added that other traits are just as important, and so is choosing the right growth genetics for your farm system.

The growth in velvet production has been reflected in Deer Select with more people getting on board, although many just use it for their own herds and not cross-herd linkage.

Recent work has shown that velvet growth isn't as heritable as once thought (it's about 45 percent) so environmental factors play a big part. Deer Select only has velvet BVs for weight, but McIntyre said shape and quality were also important, as some big antlers with very heavy tops are unsuitable for processing. "We need to find ways to record or assess these traits in Deer Select." She added that there would be big advantages for velvet breeding with more cross-herd linkage.

AgResearch scientist Jamie Ward said it was important to select on a combination of traits when breeding for venison. Going for growth alone you might end up with big-framed but not very meaty animals. "We are wanting slightly freakish animals that have the frame *and* the muscling," he said.

Stopping reproductive wastage

Good-performing mixed-age mobs will get a weaning rate of 94–95 percent, and even R2s can get 92–93 percent. While some farms regularly hit these numbers, many do not. Retired scientist **Geoff Asher** took attendees through the causes of reproductive wastage,

"Greenhouse gas numbers are my biggest concern so that's why I came along. I want reassurance that the science for assessing them is robust and that what we do will help. It was also good to see that a lot of the things we are already doing are seen as good practice."

– Wally Nelson, Lochiel



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Tech expo: continued



“We were especially interested in the Deer Select information. We do our own recording but we’re interested in using Deer Select for this. Our velvet sires come from Brock Deer and Netherdale and we always look at the BVs in the catalogues first.”

– Jackie and David Stoddart, Te Anau

which can occur right throughout the cycle. In brief these are:

- Failure to reach at least 75 percent of mature weight (in R2s). With the rise of eastern genetics, mature weights have risen, so set realistic targets.
- Poor body condition (BCS) at mating in mixed age hinds. BCS can be quickly raised to target levels after weaning with good feeding.
- Late conception – usually caused by poor BCS.
- Fetal loss. It’s not a big problem nationally, but can be up to 5 percent in some mixed age herds and 10 percent with R2s. Causes are usually multifactorial, e.g. toxoplasmosis, crop toxins. Double scanning can help identify losses.
- Peri-natal mortality: starvation/mismothering, dystocia, misadventure are all causes but stress is usually a common factor. This can be caused by overstocking or an inappropriate fawning environment.

No easy fix for parasites

Dave Lawrence dreams of a time when drench will no longer be needed. But the Southland deer farmer and vet is also a realist and he wants to at least see less being used.

In a parasites workshop he outlined the whole range of techniques available now while the industry awaits the launch of a new deer-registered drench later this year.

“I was mainly interested in the latest information on drenches, which we talk about a lot in the Southland Next Generation Advance Party. I was also interested in the genetics side. BVs are definitely becoming a thing. The venue here [at the Ascot Park] was great.”

– Josh Gill, Tuatapere



Lawrence said the vast majority of parasites are on pasture at any time, so drenching will only ever kill a small proportion. Reducing the level of challenge is the key and he suggested the following:

- Feed animals well – they will develop immunity to gutworm and lungworm faster if they aren’t stressed.
- Consider post-rut weaning – these weaners need less drench (but balance this with BCS needs of the hinds).
- Use refugia, by “seeding” pasture with populations of susceptible parasites from a few undrenched animals.
- Never put drenched fawns onto clean pasture.
- Utilise different stock classes – sheep, cattle and adult deer – to help clean up pasture and reduce challenge levels.
- Maintain good residual covers of 1400–1500 kg DM/ha. Most larvae stay in the bottom few centimetres.
- Maintain healthy soils so larvae and fungi quickly break down animal faeces and eggs won’t survive so easily. Dung beetles can help with this.
- Crops can create parasite-free zones until paddocks go back into grass. Direct drilling crops is preferable as it maintains better soil health.
- Lucerne and clover are also harder for larvae to climb so help reduce challenge.
- High-tannin forages have an anti-parasite effect.
- Select sires with high CARLA breeding values.

CARLA a great tool for parasite management

Now that the economic value of high-BV sires for the CARLA trait has been established, breeders and buyers are showing greater interest in this genetic tool.

AgResearch’s **Jamie Ward** explained that the CARLA response in deer is triggered by incoming larvae, so they are prevented from even establishing in the animal. And the really good news has been that the response works just as well for lungworm as it does for gutworms – this was not known until recently.

Ward said the higher BV numbers for CARLA are exponential, not linear. “With higher-CARLA animals you get an inversely exponential *reduction* in pasture contamination with eggs and larvae,” he said.

He added that lost liveweight gains from parasitism early in a deer’s life can never be fully regained, so it’s important to nip the issue in the bud. The CARLA response increases with age in deer.

Ward said many had been concerned that drenching programmes would somehow disrupt the CARLA response, but this wasn’t the case. That’s because the CARLA response is to incoming larvae, and not worms that are already within the animal. ■

North Island Deer Tech Expo

This will be held at Awapuni Racecourse Function Centre, 67 Racecourse Road, Palmerston North on 30 June and 31 July. It’s also accessible via Zoom if you can’t get there in person. The event is being hosted by DINZ and the Central Regions branch of NZDFA with funding from the P2P programme. For further information and to register: <https://bit.ly/2Se2eB2>

Canterbury floods: Fencing, yards, feed losses biggest concerns

Canterbury deer farmers copped their share of the flooding that hit the region late last month. At the time of writing it was unclear what numbers of stock had been lost. In some cases animals are missing rather than dead, although that's a sad reality for some.

SOUTH CANTERBURY'S KRIS Orange said loss of fencing, tracks and culverts had been the biggest impact, but the flooding had hit different people in different ways. "In one case I know of, 20km of deer fencing was lost. We had a floodgate blow out, some scouring on fencelines and one fence knocked over on the flat but otherwise it wasn't too bad." Even the free-draining country was now very wet.

Often the fences hit were a farmer's "pride and joy", recently built to protect waterways. The irony of the waterways biting back to destroy the protective infrastructure hadn't been lost on farmers.

Orange said it was hoped that missing deer would find their way back to properties, as they often do when there's been a fence breached. As well as the immediate jobs of replacing fences, restoring access and recovering stock, he said a big priority would be revising feed budgets.

There had already been offers of baleage from Otago, Southland and Hawke's Bay, which had been "humbling". Orange said it was

hoped to set up a database of offers of spare feed and grazing so these could be matched to the places of greatest need.

The flooding had majorly disrupted farm routines with scheduled jobs like post-rut weaning and pregnancy scanning put on hold for many.

Graham Peck, who is chair of the South Canterbury/North Otago DFA and farms near Pleasant Point, said they had got off lightly with a relatively light sprinkling of about 120mm. "Fortunately we're in the headwaters of a catchment so didn't have too much water flowing onto our place."

He said it was hard to know what to do for people in the immediate aftermath but he's been busy working the phone to see where help might be needed.

The worst affected were people who had felt safe behind stopbanks and didn't have the same pressure to move stock to higher ground. "Some high country farms lost floodgates but were able to get these repaired quickly before too many stock escaped. On flatter country the problem is shingle spread over paddocks. A



Darryl Butterick (right) with Peter Swann, Canterbury NZDFA, talking over the options for replacing the deer yards. The farm was hard hit. Photo: Annette Scott – Farmers Weekly.

Flooding: continued

lot of this needs shifting before deer fences can be replaced.”

Peck said Darryl Butterick’s “lovely” deer farm between the two branches of the Ashburton River had been very hard hit when both burst their banks. “They lost 80 cattle that were swept into a shelter belt but it’s unclear how many deer might be lost.” He said it was hoped to move the deer off the property to enable a clean-up. “There’s half a metre of stones through the deer shed.”

Orange and Peck said feed losses were a big issue for most. Because it had been dry, fodder beet crops were sitting high out of the ground and more easily swept away, Orange said.

Peck has been liaising with Federated Farmers and urged them to refer any deer farmers who need help to their local DFA so help can be organised. He said there were plenty of offers from people like student volunteers, although it wasn’t always practical to accept this because of the need for supervision and support.

“We’re trying to align with Federated Farmers as much as possible and have help channelled through them for health and safety reasons. Of course when it’s one deer farmer going to help a mate, that’s a different story. It’s the ones we haven’t heard from that I worry about. Deer farmers can downplay their own problems and say there’s always someone else worse off. I’d urge anyone affected by the floods who needs help or just wants someone to talk to, to contact their local DFA.”

- Graham and Sharon Peck were special guests at the Next

Generation conference last year in gratitude for their work coordinating shipments of feed north to drought-stricken Hawke’s Bay deer farmers.

NZDFA comment

The flood events in Canterbury caused huge devastation to many farms including a number of deer farms which have suffered wide-scale loss of fences, bridges, culverts and winter crops. In some cases stock escaped and in one farm, due to severe loss of infrastructure, stock are being relocated for grazing until the farm is stock proof again.

Many thanks to all the DFA branches and members, along with stock agents and other farmers who have been checking up, accessing and helping badly hit farmers. It is important that these farmers can get help and support when needed, as the sudden loss of years of work and the cost of the rebuild is a devastating blow.

The cost in time and money will be huge for the cleanup and rebuilding of infrastructure, let alone replacing lost winter feed reserves.

If any farms have surplus space for grazing stock or balage, contact your local DFA branch or stock agent. If you know of any farmer struggling, ensure they get the support they need.

– John Somerville, NZDFA Executive Committee Chair ■

“Great tool” for information sharing

Cloud Farmer users Grant and Sally Charteris recently won the Premier Elworthy Award at the 2021 deer industry conference in Invercargill.

LEAD JUDGE AT the awards, Janet Gregory, said of the entrants: “All are leaders in the industry, show great passion and stewardship of the land, and are supporting their local communities. But the Charterises were notable for their meticulous planning, documentation, and analysis. This informs their stock and feed management in their district’s challenging climate.”

Grant sees environmental enhancement as one more tool in the marketing toolbox to show Forest Road Farm is a sustainable and sensitively run business. “Stand above the anti-farming complaints and plan for the future. There is no such thing as a finished environment document, but use photos and goals to show the work in progress and what has been achieved,” Grant says.

Cloud Farmer’s customisable Environmental Records page is a great start for planning and detailing projects. “We need to get better at telling our story,” Grant says. With Cloud Farmer you can add tables and photos, and even upload your Farm Environment Plan to keep everything in one place and your progress on track.

Grant came back to the family farm in the early 2000s. His driving passion is velvet. “With velvet you get such rapid genetic gains and improvements from your input. That just feeds the motivation – you want to see how far you can take it,” Grant explains. “I like the people and sales side of it – I don’t want to be a commodity trader.” An on-farm sale is held in each December, with about 18 velvet sire stags and 100 yearling hinds on offer.

Grant also runs a small flock of self-shedding Wiltshires as well

as Hereford cattle. Cloud Farmer makes it simple to keep records on all kinds of stock.

Wife Sally teaches three days a week, so there is the usual juggle of kids to various activities which is shared – though Grant admits Sally handles the bulk of that load! Sally is also closely involved in the farming operation.

A recent farm audit really brought home the value of Cloud Farmer to Grant. “Having Cloud Farmer pulled us through the audit – we were able to show something and justify it so easily. It’s a great tool for information sharing with staff too.” ■

- **Article Supplied**



Winter grazing: getting intense

How's your winter going? As always, by this time of year many deer mobs will be on winter crop while pastures take a breather. This will be especially so in Canterbury, Southland and Otago, but throughout the country winter crops are now an essential part of any deer system, whether it's to help carry weaners through to good weights by spring, keep condition on pregnant hinds or help stags recover from the roar.

WELFARE AND ENVIRONMENTAL issues around intensive winter grazing (IWG) have been attracting a lot of attention recently, to the point where the Government was poised to introduce a raft of regulations governing the practice. After some constructive dialogue with the primary sector, that has been delayed by a year until May 2022, but the strictness of these regulations will be determined in part by how well livestock farmers – deer included – manage IWG this year. We're on notice.

New rules start next May

From May 2022, when IWG rules in the National Environmental Standards for freshwater are reapplied, if a farmer cannot meet the permitted activity standards under the regulations, they will need to either get a resource consent or have a certified Freshwater Farm Plan.

While it's true deer don't bring the added stress of giving birth while on crops – that's a cattle and sheep issue – everything else is much the same. All animals need a reasonably dry and comfortable place to lie down, and they all need access to shelter and additional feed if conditions turn nasty. At the same time, the risk of soil damage and sediment loss in all farm environments needs to be managed.

With all of this in mind and much more scrutiny signalled from the Government (and activists), DINZ and NZDFA are urging all deer farmers to take special care with IWG this year. Given that much of that work should have started a few months ago at the planning stage, this article is something of a mid-year check-up on progress.

Fortunately there are plenty of resources on hand to help with good management and planning. For a start we have our own Deer Fact series, especially this one: <https://bit.ly/3obThUk>

There is also an excellent brief checklist brought out by DINZ and four other producer organisations. The pre-winter traffic light styled checklist covered:

- excluding stock from waterways
- protecting critical source areas
- strategic grazing management (buffers, grazing down slope etc)
- placement of supplementary feed and water troughs
- access to firm ground and shelter
- feed budgeting allowing extra
- planning for bad weather events
- documenting the season, including with photos.

The checklist can be found at: <https://bit.ly/3bmzMU6>

There's a more comprehensive resource available in the form of the Intensive Winter Grazing Module, which provides a template for planning, implementing, checking and reviewing winter

grazing. It's been published by the Ministry for Primary Industries and Ministry for the Environment with some input from regional councils and industry groups including ours. You can get it at:

<https://bit.ly/2RRhG1T>

It's not intended to replace existing farm environment plans, but can be used to update and inform plans. (About two-thirds of deer farms currently have a farm environment plan, although not all include an IWG module.)

Completing the module is not a leave pass from local regulations. In some cases regional council rules will be stricter and you may still need to gain a consent. All that said, completing the module and updating your farm plan can be used to support you in meeting local rules, applying for a consent or developing the IWG component of your certified freshwater farm plan.

DINZ environmental stewardship manager Lindsay Fung says that while the new regulations will add some complexity for deer farms using IWG next year, it will mean a series of adjustments rather than radical change. He noted that regional council rules, such as Otago's Plan Change 8, can take precedence over national standards, so there are no simple blanket rules for the whole country.

Phil McKenzie, DINZ manager, farm performance, urges farmers to carefully document their winter grazing this year with good photos as well as any paper records. He says that a setup that looks fine in the eyes of farmers may not appear the same way to members of the public, so it's also important to bear that in mind when planning, even if there is no material effect of a practice on welfare or environment.

NZDFA Executive Committee chair John Somerville says that IWG, especially on flat, wet, heavy Southland soils, can attract negative publicity. While steeper country presented challenges in terms of sediment loss, it was the pictures of cows standing in mud on the Southland flats that raised welfare concerns.

He says it makes good sense to budget for a buffer of at least 10 percent when planning IWG crops, to help cover extra demand caused by bad weather.

Despite the best laid plans, things can go wrong in a bad winter. Phil McKenzie says that if farmers notice a neighbour struggling with keeping stock safe and well fed when on winter crop it can be



The Intensive Winter Grazing Module includes some useful tips.

Virtual tours keep us in touch with markets

For someone who hasn't been able to get up to New Zealand's key velvet markets in Asia since early last year thanks to Covid travel restrictions, Rhys Griffiths sure gets around.

THE DINZ MANAGER, markets has just completed his third "virtual tour" of velvet markets in Korea, maintaining vital lines of communication with companies that buy our product and using increasingly sophisticated tools to do so.

The first online tour was done in May 2020, when Griffiths also brought along DINZ environmental stewardship manager Lindsay Fung and former science and policy adviser Catharine Sayer for the ride. A second tour was done in October 2020 at the start of the velvetting season. Griffiths said that contact was focused on maintaining confidence at a time when global supply chains were coming under increasing pressure.

For the October tour, Griffiths took a large entourage for the ride. There were pre-recorded contributions from DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat, DINZ velvet sector board representative Tony Cochrane, plus several velvet producers.



DINZ CE Innes Moffat and New Zealand velvet producers sent direct messages to our markets via the virtual tour.

For the latest tour (early May 21) There was input from AgResearch scientist Stephen Haines, who introduced an updated version of the Deer Velvet Technical Manual.

Haines told guests on the tour that there had been an "explosion" in new science-based knowledge about velvet since the last revision 12 years ago. There is a lot of new scientific literature in areas like extraction, composition and health benefits such as immune function and anti-ageing. He said it was possible new research into the effects of deer velvet on innate immune function might be available later this year.

Another important connection on this recent tour was New Zealand's Ambassador to Korea, Phil Turner. Griffiths said NZ Trade & Enterprise and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade have been incredibly supportive of the New Zealand velvet sector. "I always plan to catch up with our officials in Seoul at the end of our market visits, to update them on how things are going, and the virtual tour is no different. We are very grateful for the support MEAT and NZTE have provided the New Zealand deer industry, and which has only increased during these Covid times."

He said the "Made with Care" branding developed for New Zealand food and beverages provided another important platform for our relations with customers in velvet markets.

Griffiths explained that New Zealand's velvet story fits well into the "ESG" framework that's increasingly important in Korea. The three interlocking components – environment, social and governance – provide an opportunity for compelling stories from New Zealand. VelTrak and our NVSB system, for example, fit nicely into the "governance" component and set us apart from less well-regulated velvet suppliers like Russia. He said New Zealand's successful response to Covid-19 had also garnered respect from

Intensive winter grazing: continued

difficult to confront them or offer help directly when intervention may not be welcomed. He suggests using Federated Farmers' 0800 FARMING hotline (0800 327 646) in these cases, as they can check the situation and offer farmer-friendly help if needed. They will refer any deer-related enquiries to DINZ if the need arises.

If you don't have a Farm Environment Plan, or need to update it to include a wintering plan, consider joining a Deer Industry Environment Group. ■

Contact: phil.mckenzie@deernz.org or Tel 027 499 7809

An extra pair of hands for environment work

Megan McCall has been appointed for two days a week as an environment project manager for the P2P Deer Industry Environment Groups (DIEGs).

McCall, who also works at AbacusBio, grew up on a Southland sheep and beef farm and graduated with a molecular

biotechnology degree at the University of Otago. She works with clients on their goals, such as in-market, genetics, or farming system changes and is an experienced programme manager and facilitator.

The P2P DIEGs, which operate in a similar way to Advance Parties, have been strongly supported by deer farmers. Phil McKenzie says membership of the groups has provided good support for farmers putting together their Farm Environment Plans. "They will also assist farmers working through developing certified freshwater farm plans."

Megan can be contacted at AbacusBio: 03 477 6375; 027 207 6074; mmccall@abacusbio.co.nz



our market partners in Asia.

The 45-minute tour featured about 15 minutes of presentations followed by about 30 minutes of conversation with key customers. And it was not just one tour but fourteen of them. Griffiths said the interactions were one-one-one with key customers and each tour was tailored accordingly. For example, the conversation with a high-end customer like Korea Ginseng Corporation would be different than one held with someone more on the commodity side of the business.

Repeating the exercise that many times was a challenge, both technically – Griffiths had to start one of the tours in his car – but also in terms of keeping it fresh.

So is this the way of the future? Griffiths is not so sure about that. Since the first virtual tour last year when it was all “shiny



AgResearch scientist Stephen Haines discussed the latest revision of the Deer Velvet Technical Manual.

and new”, the gloss has worn off a little. “The Koreans have come up with a new word for this type of interaction” ‘untact’. That’s to express what it’s like staying in ‘contact’ from a distance.”

The technology will probably continue to be used in some ways in a post-Covid world, but Griffiths says there will never be a substitute for meeting person to person. And while he hasn’t missed the stresses and strains of international travel these past 18 months, “in that market you really need to be able to sit down with people in the same room”.

NZ a case study for traceability conference

Rhys Griffiths recently took part in an international (virtual) conference on food traceability, where New Zealand’s experience with implementing VelTrak for velvet tracing was presented as a case study.

Griffiths said traceability is one of three key components in food safety – the other two are food handling and keeping food free of contaminants such as chemical residues.

He said that while the paper-based Velvet Status Declarations were a big step up when they were introduced, they are now a thing of the past. “They represent very old technology now. There were too many gaps and opportunities for human error to creep in. VelTrak was needed to future-proof our industry and prepare us for events such as an overseas audit of our systems.”

There was some interest from other conference goers in the technology behind VelTrak, he said. “It was a very techie conference.” ■

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Meet the staff: Cenwynn Philip

DINZ communications and administration coordinator **Cenwynn Philip** joined the staff in mid 2015 after spending time in London working in marketing for an app company, and then a group of gastro pubs. Previously she'd studied industrial design at university.

"MY PARENTS WERE in horticulture while I was growing up, so feel like I can relate to a lot of farmers – we just didn't have the animals!" Cenwynn says.

In 2019 Cenwynn and her family moved from Wellington to Featherston in the Wairarapa. She returned from parental leave in 2020 and now works part-time (Wed-Fri), two days at home and one day in the office (usually Thursdays).

The job covers administration for the NZDFA (and some for DINZ), website and database management (a main focus at the moment), outward communications (newsletters, social media, etc) and various ad hoc jobs.

"Having 'comms' in my title I get a lot of calls from media or people wanting statements, but it's easy to connect them to the right person," Cenwynn says.

She was initially appointed part-time to cover parental leave for colleague Amy Wills, stayed on to cover Amy's second parental leave in 2017 before becoming permanent full-time. Cenwynn's role expanded to include more event organisation and recently

database management has become a main focus.

The Next Generation Programme is a definite highlight each year. "It can be challenging to organise, but it is also such an enjoyable event. Getting out on farm and seeing these young guns, the future of the industry, getting to know each other and forming bonds that will last a lifetime, is really rewarding."

Cenwynn says her colleagues at DINZ and the DFA Executive Committee/SAP are "just fantastic" to work with. "They're such a great team. They make an already great job even more so!" ■



Introducing Emil Murphy: Science and policy manager

If you had a feeling you've seen DINZ's newly appointed science and policy manager around before, you'd be right. Emil Murphy, who joined the staff on 3 May, spent 8 months at DINZ on secondment from the Ministry for Primary Industries back in 2016, when he was providing maternity leave cover.

THIS TIME HE'S made a permanent move, taking over the position created in January when his predecessor Catharine Sayer left.

Murphy was born and raised in Sweden, obtaining a degree in veterinary science at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences in Uppsala. His father, Michael Murphy, is a sixth-generation Irish-American who moved to Sweden in the 1970s, hence Emil's distinctly non-Scandinavian surname.

"My father completed a PhD in ruminant nutrition in the 1980s when I was 11, so I've always been around a research environment," Murphy says. Another enduring theme has been a love of horses, which continued in his adopted home in New Zealand.

He worked in large animal practice in Sweden for a few years, mainly with cattle and pigs and including a stint in the north of the country, but "not working on reindeer", he notes. There followed a variety of positions with some time spent in mixed practice

and also as a government veterinarian in meat plants.

Murphy gravitated towards roles involving food safety, biosecurity and public health, including 5 years working part-time for the Swedish defence forces looking after working dogs and also working in the area of defence against biologicals.

He came to New Zealand on his OE in 2005, settling first in Christchurch. "I bummed around for a while – my mother was not impressed!"



continued on page 43

Don Bennett passes away

Don Bennett, the driving force behind Deer Genetics – one of the industry’s most influential and long-standing deer studs – died suddenly on 14 April, aged 75. Only two days earlier he was enjoying the company of industry friends at the South Canterbury/North Otago NZDFA annual general meeting. The following tribute to Don was written by **Lynda Gray**, who has kindly agreed to its reprinting in *Deer Industry News*.

THE SUDDEN DEATH of deer industry stalwart Don Bennett will come as a shock to many.

I was lucky enough to talk with Don as part of the research for *In Hindsight* and he told me that being part of the deer industry had been “a hell of a ride. We’ve been all around the world and to places we’d never otherwise have got to.”

I’ve included his recollections from the early days of the velvet industry in the book.

Don’s involvement with deer started in the mid-1970s when he was the MAF meat inspector in charge of the wild recovered venison supplied to Bergs Game in Whakatane. In the downtime he told me that he “dabbled” in possum skins this funded his move into deer farming.

“I remember we bought 165,000 skins in three months and we were on 50 cents commission per skin our bank manager told us to get an accountant, and our accountant told us to buy deer.”

He did just that, buying deer from near and far in the late 1970s and running them on a couple of small blocks. He started trading deer and before long was taken on by Dalgety as a deer rep, becoming the North Island deer manager in the early 1980s. The role included the coordinating of live sales as well as the velvet procurement team of 25 reps. It was an all-consuming job.

“It was seven days a week, 14 hours a day but it wasn’t a job, it was fun. It was a new industry and there were no rules.”

Don also farmed deer on 1,000 acres in a sharefarming arrangement.

“We were developing it and were running a few hundred but that turned to custard following the sharemarket crash in 1987.”

He eventually branched out on his own as an independent agent for deer, venison and velvet procurement. He also imported deer.



Don Bennett pictured with Anne at the 2015 Rising Stars awards.

The Bennett family moved south in the late 1980s to Woodbury in South Canterbury. Don established Deer Genetics NZ, an internationally recognised red deer trophy breeding and genetics business that he developed and grew with son Kelly.

Thank you, Don, for your contribution in shaping the New Zealand deer industry.

- Writing in the DINZ eNews, NZDFA producer manager Tony Pearse described Don as the kaumatua of Deer Genetics, hugely knowledgeable, a big personality and a friend to many in the industry. “The NZDFA and DINZ extend their sympathy to Don’s widow, Anne, and their children and their spouses, Neena; Kelly and Felicia; Sarah and Wayne; Rebecca and Sam. Don will be greatly missed.” ■

Introducing Emil: continued

It was there he picked up working with horses again, as he had in Sweden, and met his now-wife, Selena, who was a riding instructor at the time. The couple now live on the Kapiti coast, where Selena is still heavily involved with pony clubs.

Murphy joined the New Zealand Food Safety Authority (part of the Ministry for Primary Industries, MPI) in 2012 as a specialist adviser in the red meat section working on domestic regulations and providing technical support. Following his 6-month secondment to DINZ in 2016 he returned to MPI and a biosecurity policy role, working on NAIT and readiness and response around bovine Tb.

“I was roped into the *M. bovis* response when that hit and was involved for 17 months in the liaison arena until the end of 2018. A lot of the work was helping improve farmer engagement, trying to get better coordination with enforcement staff.”

Following a few months off for a trip back to Sweden, Murphy returned to MPI in early 2019 as a principal food safety adviser in the meat area, where he remained until his move to DINZ.

With a strong background in science, animal health, biosecurity, food safety, policy and regulation, Murphy has direct experience in many of the ongoing policy issues being tackled by the deer industry. In fact the initial areas of work for him at DINZ have involved biosecurity preparedness for diseases that could affect deer, such as foot and mouth disease and chronic wasting disease.

With these and many other issues piling up for the deer industry, Murphy says he’s hit the ground running. “That period of a few months working at DINZ 5 years ago was great preparation, plus I’ve been having contact with the industry on various issues since then, so that has helped me get up to speed quickly.” ■

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