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Deer Industry News

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

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Aligning science and strategy

In the same way that 'Form Follows Function', 'Science Follows Strategy' – or at least it should do. Gone are the days when gentlemen (and, occasionally, gentlewomen) with what were termed 'independent means' followed their whim and discovered new things about the world in which they were living. Robert Boyle, Antoine Lavoisier, and, to a certain extent, Charles Darwin, were all gentlemen scientists, born into wealthy families and free to explore and, indeed, fund exploration.



These days, where funding determines career fortune, scientists are constrained by the goals of the funding bodies. In particular for DINZ, the Sustainable Food and Fibre Futures Fund gives the clue about the aim for the Ministry for Primary Industries. A cornerstone requirement for SFFF is co-investment. The applicant or other co-investors must contribute to the cost of the project, some of which might be considered as 'in-kind'. Also in the criteria are the long-term benefits and knowledge transfer to the end user.

For co-investment from DINZ the investment must be aligned with strategy... and though the alignment has probably always been there, it will now be overtly so. The timing of the DINZ science reorganisation fits with the adoption of the new strategy, where we 'lead a confident industry into the future'. A confident industry has profitability, certainty and a good reputation. Science, research, development, extension, and adoption are key to all three components.

To help achieve what is required, and following on from the science review, DINZ has established a Research Committee as a sub-committee of the board embracing the Research Trust. The Research Committee will be advised by a yet-to-be-appointed Research Advisory Panel comprising two people nominated by NZDFA, two science experts in different areas, and two DINZ employees.

In addition to their nominated people, the DFA will be gathering information on concerns and ideas for testing. Although there will be one main funding round each year, the importance of 'acute problems' has been recognised. Concerns and issues should be indicated whenever they arise so that funding can be organised and research started. In this we are working with AgResearch to ensure that the partnership that has achieved so much, continues into the future. Productivity, animal welfare and the environment are top of mind for farmers and scientists, and these areas are where DINZ has been, and will continue, investing.

The new DINZ strategy is being matched with the new approach to science, research, development and technology transfer. DINZ science and policy manager, Emil Murphy, has embraced the opportunity and is working with board members and CEO Innes Moffat.

Your role is to let the DFA know what your priorities are and where your innovative approach to the issues ahead is leading. Economic viability while keeping ahead of societal expectations is vital for all of us. ■

Dr Jacqueline Rowarth

Adjunct Professor Lincoln University, is a member of the Scientific Council of the World Farmers' Organisation and a Director of Ravensdown, DairyNZ, Deer Industry NZ and NZ Animal Evaluation Ltd. The thoughts and analysis in this article are her own. jsrowarth@gmail.com

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Stunning

In this photo at last year's AgResearch event celebrating 50 Years of deer science at Invermay Jonathan Wallis explains the inner workings of the immobilization net gun for live deer capture that his father, Sir Tim, helped develop. As it turned out the gadget was a complicated beast to operate requiring great skill and nerves of steel from the helicopter pilot and crew. Regardless, the then new technology was a classic example of the visionary thinking and practical technology that Sir Tim backed and developed in pursuit of growing and developing New Zealand's deer farming industry. A potted history of his contribution to the deer industry is covered on pages 12-14.



Word of the Year



Impress friends, guests and family over the festive season by dropping in to conversation the 2023 Word of the Year, 'AI'. Just to clarify for the die-hard deer geneticists and stud

breeders, AI is the acronym for Artificial Intelligence, not Artificial Insemination. Whether AI, an acronym, qualifies as a word is a moot point. Acronyms are not recognized as a word in the game of Scrabble, but according to Collins Dictionary - who deems the annual Word of the Year winner - says it is. AI was chosen because it "has accelerated at such a fast pace and become the dominant conversation of 2023."

Timeout with Paddy

South Canterbury deer farming newcomer Sam Innes was born and raised on Black Forest Station, a neighbouring property to Haldon Station. Sam was one of the six pupils who attended the Haldon Station Primary School. He recalls lots of fun times and happenings and also the punishment for errant behaviour - banishment to the office of "Mr Boyd" (Paddy) for schoolwork. It was a once and never-to-be-repeated occurrence for Sam. "I've known Paddy all my life and it's great to see what he has gone on to achieve and contribute to the deer industry."

Read about Sam and wife Annie's deer farming pathway on page 32.

Spiers Memorial Trust

The Spiers Memorial Trust is a 'war chest' for the funding of innovative projects and leadership development, Tony Pearce said at the DFA Chairs meeting.

The trust was initially called the Ian Spiers Memorial Trust, in honour of the former NZDFA president. The trust, established in 1989, was funded by the Spiers family, Game Industry Board and some DFA branches. Since then wound-up branches and other groups including the NZ Fallow Society had invested funds. Over the years about \$190,000 had been allocated to various projects. The projects used to be mostly practically farming based but had evolved to include deer-allied off farm innovation projects. Trustees also welcomed funding applications from branches,

groups and individuals for leadership development opportunities such as those offered by the Institute of Directors and Agri-Women's Development Trust. "It's an amazing initiative and we look forward to receiving applications," he said.

Fermenting a future

Colour follows Olivia Barnes wherever she goes. Her kraut is almost too beautiful to eat, and the labels are pretty enough to hang. This young North Canterbury mother and wife of Tim Johnson (see page 28), is the creator of Wild Child Ferments. She's always enjoyed the art and science of fermentation, being raised in a foodie family, and her time in the wine industry cemented this.



"I love fermentation in the scientific realm, but also that it's a whole lot of experimenting under certain parameters," she says.

At her home-based 'fermentary' in Greta Valley she makes small batch sauerkraut and kimchi from local ingredients.

"It is an ancient way of food preservation that is experiencing a much-needed revival."

These brightly filled and labeled jars are splashed throughout the district and on shop shelves as far as Christchurch.

Living on the deer farm and with a toddler Twyla, the timing seemed right to launch her business. The recent purchase of a new kitchen appliance means no more hand cutting cabbages and has been a time saver, but the steadily growing business often demands late nights and early starts.

"Being a busy mum and having Twyla is my favourite thing, without her I wouldn't have dreamed of doing this."

The encouragement from Tim has helped enormously.

"Tim has always backed me to just do it, because you don't know unless you try."

@wildchildfermentsnz

Annabelle Latz

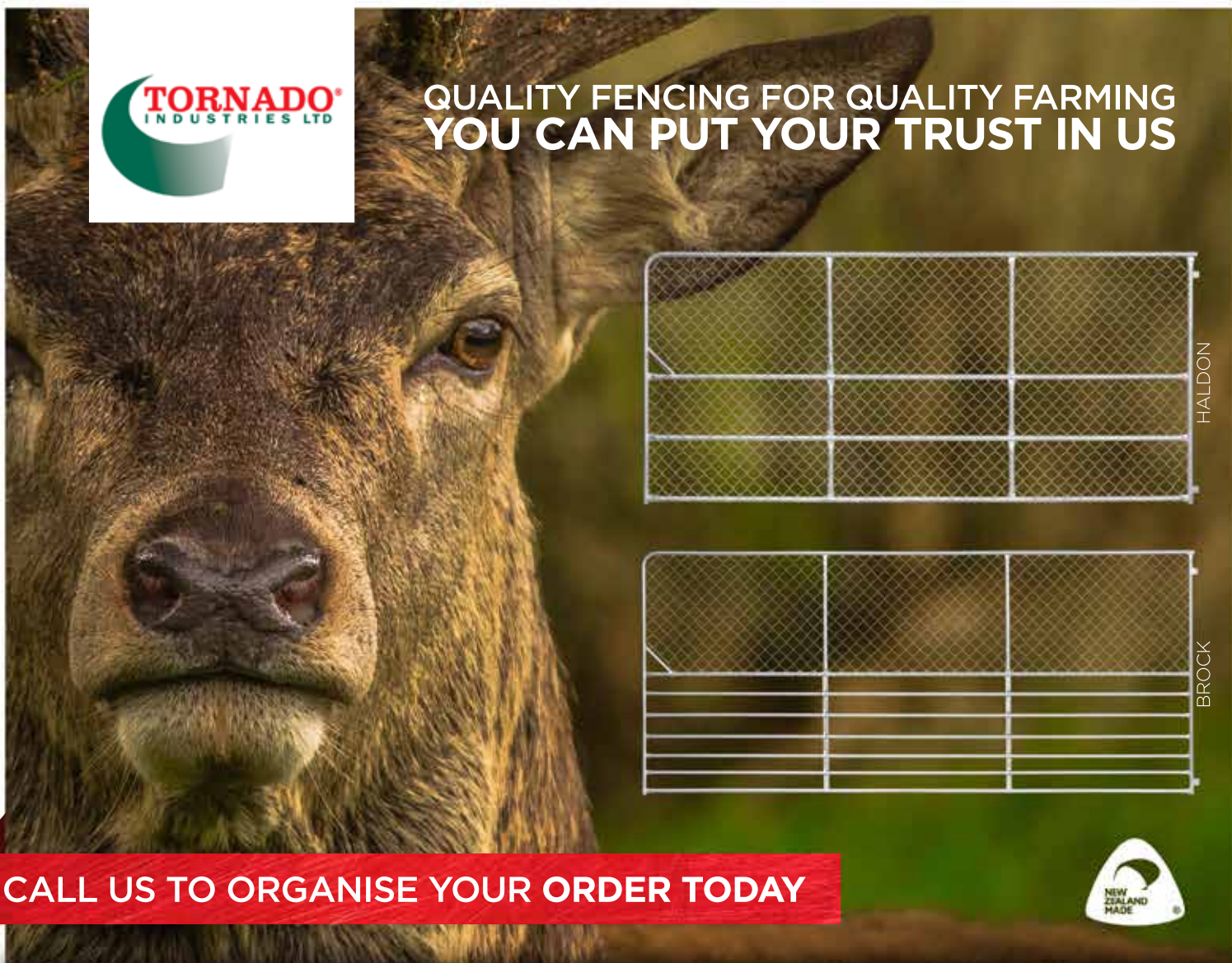
Milked Stout

At the NZDFA Chairs meeting a 'mock' stag semen chaser was the pre-dinner aperitif served at the Green Man pub. The central Wellington pub has a track record of serving exotic-infused beverages. A couple of years ago it served a stag semen infused tippie, unfortunately the NZDFA budget wouldn't stretch to the virile protein-charged addition. But the deer crowd got a taste of what could have been with the stout based chaser including an undisclosed 'mock semen' additive. Other novelty tots served by the pub over the years include apple-infused horse semen shots (2011) and unadulterated syringes of stag semen (2013). The pub also once brewed a roast lamb and mint craft beer, using potatoes, carrots, peas, kumara and lamb reduction. Cheers! ■





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Mike Ferrier

Up for the Challenge

Mike Ferrier is probably the youngest and newest DFA chair, taking on the leadership of the Waipa branch in June. Born and raised in the Hawke's Bay he developed an affinity for rural living through the stud stock and farm management roles filled by his dad. Mike's farming career started the week after finishing his final school exam. His first job, on a mixed livestock farm, introduced him to deer which he quickly formed an affinity with. His next role at Pamu's Rangitaiki Station with 11,000 deer was a rewarding and total immersion into deer farming. He had a few deer-free years after leaving Rangitaiki but got back to them on taking up employment at William and Karen Oliver's home farm in January 2008. Nowadays Mike and wife Christie along with kids Hayley (14), Sophie (11), and Katie (9) manage and live on an Oliver family-owned farm near Otorohanga.

What's your day-to-day deer job?

I manage a 980ha (730ha effective) mixed farming operation for Willie and Karen Oliver 20 kilometres east of Otorohanga. We run 600 velvet stags, 500 venison hinds, 2000 crossbred ewes and finish up to about 250 heifers, dependent on seasonal conditions. We also grow maize.

What in particular do you like about working with deer?

I really like the velvetting side of things, watching it grow from button drop to harvest in 65 days is incredible. I enjoy watching the stags as they move through the age groups. There are groups of stags I get to know; the good ones, and those that aren't so easy to manage but even though I like the challenge of working with them.

How did the DFA chair's role come about?

I've been part of the Waipa branch for 12 years and spent most of that time sitting and listening. Leith (Chick) was looking to step aside from the chair's role and shoulder tapped me. I wasn't very keen at the start, but someone's got to do it. I think it will be a great learning experience and give me the opportunity to see the industry from a different perspective.

You attended your first DFA Chairs' meeting in October, what were your lasting impressions?

What stood out for me is just how approachable the DINZ Board, staff and DFA Executive are. I can't think of any other farming industry where people in these roles are like that.

One of the sessions at the meeting was the Futures Triangle exercise where you had to align yourself with one of three groups: a visionary 'dreamer', a present and practical 'doer', or a 'leader of the past'. Where do you sit?

I'm definitely at the present and doer end of things. I find it hard to sit, write and listen which means I'm going to have to work at any governance type role, but I'm willing to learn.

What's been the highs and lows of 2023?

It's been a pretty good year farming wise. We were lucky to get off lightly from Cyclone Gabrielle, we had a good winter and a mild spring, and the venison schedule is getting up to where it should be.

What are your hopes and aspirations for 2024?

Further improvement in the venison price and hopefully there will be less uncertainty and greater stability around velvet prices. We're happy with what we're doing. The whole family gets involved on farm and we really enjoy working for great people in a great place, although that's not unusual!

What's happening at Xmas?

We alternate between the other staff the farm management over Christmas and this year we're at home. We'll have the in-laws on Christmas day and I'm looking forward to some hunting and fishing along the 7kms of the Waipa River that boundaries the farm.

How will you serve your venison over the festive season?

For me there's only one way – off the BBQ with a bit of salt and pepper. ■



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“They really are a quality product, and we don’t buy anything else,” Paddy says.

We also worked with Southland deer farmer Eddie Brock who was fed up with repairing netting gates during the roar. We came up with a new design using high tensile continuous rails through the bottom half of the gate. It’s stood up to the antics of rutting stags and Eddie says he hasn’t had to repair a gate in over five years.

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Long-term benefits anticipated

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

The news that China will implement new rules for imported velvet used in Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is unsettling, but the long-term benefits are positive, DINZ CEO Innes Moffat says.

“We see this as a positive for the industry because it’s going to clarify the import rules for deer velvet.”

He emphasises that nothing will change immediately, and it will be business as usual for the remainder of the 2023 – 2024 season.

“We can continue to export velvet this season under existing arrangements, and we have time to prepare and transition as we continue negotiations.”

The crux of the change, notified from China through the Ministry for Primary Industries on November 20 is that from May 1, 2024 only dried velvet will be imported into China as a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) product. MPI is now discussing the new arrangements for importing frozen velvet with their Chinese counterparts as a new import procedure will have to be agreed between the two countries.

“We do not have a time frame for this, but MPI have said that agreeing the new pathway for frozen velvet prior to the 2024/25 season is a high priority. We’ve emphasised the importance of this to MPI who are working with Chinese authorities,” Moffat says.

DINZ board chair Mandy Bell said it was important to note that the change was not targeting specifically New Zealand or New



LONG-TERM GAIN: DINZ CEO Innes Moffat says rule changes around velvet imports to China will clarify and secure access.

and transparent rules for the importation of all TCM products, regardless of the country of origin.

There would be continued demand within China for frozen velvet because of the sizeable industry based around its use and MPI would continue to negotiate access for frozen product through an import category other than TCM, Moffat says.

DINZ markets manager, Rhys Griffiths notes that South Korea is still the dominant end consumer of New Zealand velvet.

“That’s important to understand, they are our main end market, and they want our velvet so they may look at alternative pathways to bring it direct from New Zealand in the future.”

In summary he said that in the short-term the immediate concerns around the signalled changes had been “triaged” and all velvet buyers were doing what they needed to get velvet into China for this season.

“For the longer-term we see the positive benefits of the proposed changes. It will give us clear and secure access for both dried and frozen velvet and have our product recognised which is something we’ve been working on for some time.”

Moffat added that the change should make for a more transparent importation pathway which up until now had been problematic since the signing of the NZ-China free trade agreement in 2008.

“We have had three or four instances over the past 18 months where imports have been held up due to confusion over



END USERS: About 65 percent of New Zealand’s annual 1000 tonne velvet production is exported to China. About half of that is processed and re-exported to South Korea, the main end market for New Zealand velvet.

to find better pathways to open up access but haven't been successful in unpicking that regulatory pathway so this change will enable that for dried velvet and long-term it will also help with frozen velvet."

Of the 1000 tonnes produced annually in New Zealand about 65% is exported to China. About half of that (325 tonnes) was processed and re-exported to Korea in recent years. DINZ estimates that about 325 tonnes of New Zealand velvet is consumed in China. By achieving clearer access for dried velvet, that volume could be dried and exported from New Zealand, once that drying capacity was created. New Zealand had processing and drying capacity for about 100 - 150 tonnes, leaving a shortfall of about 150 - 175 tonnes, Griffiths said.

"We're mindful of that gap but we think it will be possible to scale up processing."

He added that development of further processing was an opportunity for value-adding and increasing the earning potential of velvet.

Deer farmer and DINZ board producer appointee Paddy Boyd said there would be short-term pain for long-term gain.

He believed the board had acted proactively and openly in dealing with the announcement of the changes and had worked hard to ensure that this velvet season proceeded as usual.

"As a farmer we can have confidence in MPI negotiating with China."

He said there could be a difficult period next year as a new protocol was agreed "but if we can negotiate a clearer pathway on how our velvet gets into Korea and China the benefit should be more market stability.

"We need China, and China needs us so if we can meet the needs of each other through clearer, defined channels that will be good." ■



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What's the story?

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

'Nature's Superpower' was a unifying tag line or in marketing speak a "single minded proposition" for New Zealand farm produced velvet and venison, DINZ markets manager Rhys Griffiths said at the October Branch Chairs meeting.



The story was about "premier-isation" and the unifying of New Zealand farmed velvet and venison.

"Over the years there's been some great marketing stories for some of our unique products but what we wanted to do is bring venison and velvet under a single banner that exporters can use and weave in with their own marketing stories," he says.

Brand strategy and design specialists Sven & Friends, whose clients include Pāmu and Silver Fern Farms came up with the imagery and "proprietary words" to tell the story.

"We wanted our own language and imagery that we can be proud of," Griffiths says.

The Trademarked tagline, 'Nature's Superpower' wasn't about promoting velvet and venison as having extraordinary super powers but rather about the unique attributes of both.

"We wanted our own language and imagery that we can be proud of."

Rhys Griffiths

At naturesuperpower.com the New Zealand deer farming story is explained from the founding by bold and audacious pioneers and the ongoing evolution of, and development of farming systems focused on animal welfare, care for the land and kaitiakitanga (guardianship and protection). It talks about regulations to ensure quality and consistency New Zealand farmed velvet and venison as well as environmental on farm management, codes of welfare and quality assurance requirements .

Velvet is described as a 'hero ingredient' in premium, contemporary health food products harvested under strict

regulatory standards to ensure product safety and quality. Venison is dubbed as a completely different culinary experience to wild game meat and as something 'surprising and special'. The slick video is well worth a look, it features Hawke's Bay farmer Rupert Gaddum and daughter supplemented with evocative panoramic shots of farmed deer free-ranging in stunning South Island high-country.

Nature's Superpower was released earlier this year in Korea and will be progressively rolled out with minimal fanfare over the coming year.

Looking back and looking forward

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

DINZ board members reviewed the year-to-date and beyond at the NZDFA Chairs meeting.

DINZ chair Mandy Bell said it had been a year of hard work during which many stones were turned bringing changes to leadership roles, consultation processes and active communication - and that would continue. There had been "pretty robust" discussions and it had been a difficult time, but she was passionately proud of the industry.

"We have exciting times ahead...we need to keep thinking about the triangle, future thinking and transformation."

Board observer Hamish Glendinning said he was impressed with the level of maturity of the board and both the team and individual skills that each member brought to the table during the change process. He acknowledged it had been a tough year and it was important to celebrate the successes made and move on positively.

A highlight was the May conference.

"It was a positive experience and what impressed me was the level of engagement."

Venison marketing and processing appointed member Nigel Jones, general manager strategy for Alliance Group talked about the growing importance of building and enacting an environmental, social and governance (ESG) framework. He drew on his Alliance experience where the ESG vision was designed to understand what the market wanted and what the market needed. What evolved was a framework based around the pillars of procurement (ensuring animal welfare



IMPRESSED: Hamish Glendinning was inspired by the interaction and skill base of the DINZ board.



TICKET TO THE GAME: An ESG was essential to meet the expectations of customers, Nigel Jones said

and environmental criteria), people (health, safety and wellbeing), community (working with community stakeholders and ensuring employees had the right training and recognized qualifications), and the key requirements of customers. The deer industry needed to enact an ESG he said, because of growing customer and market expectations.

“Different markets have different views and different biases that they focus on. In Europe it’s pretty comprehensive. It’s absolutely about animal welfare, it’s absolutely about the environment, it’s absolutely about reducing carbon. It’s all about employment, being a good employer and caring for your people,” Jones said.

“We have exciting times ahead...we need to keep thinking about the triangle, future thinking and transformation.”

Mandy Bell

But in other markets there may be a bias to animal welfare or food safety elements.

“Regardless, every market wants and expects something... it’s not about a premium offer, it’s a ticket to the game.”

Board deputy chair Gerard Hickey was upfront and direct, challenging the industry to up its game on farm QA.

“When I entered the industry in 1993 we were leaders in that space....I would contend we are now laggards, especially in the global space.”

He countered his provocative comments with a solution, urging the NZDFA to get involved with New Zealand Farm Assurance Incorporated (NZFAI), which owns both the NZFAP Plus and NZFAP market assurance certification programmes. He said that active participation in NZFAI’s technical advisory group would ensure that deer farming-related QA made commercial sense and that the voice of the industry was heard “because those decisions are being made without us, so I think it’s one opportunity we should consider.” For deer farmers, joining and completing NZFAP and NZFAP Plus standards would ultimately streamline farm auditing and could align with premium venison programmes, he said.

For **producer appointee Jacqueline Rowarth** the aligning of research with board strategy had been a highlight. A key part of the DINZ restructuring had been reviewing leadership within research which had led to the establishment of a new research sub-committee.

“We are now ensuring that strategy is aligned through the research and



QA BOOST NEEDED: Getting onboard with NZFAI and NZFAP Plus market assurance would be a smart way to be at the forefront of QA developments and streamline farm auditing, Gerard Hickey said.



KEEN TO CONNECT: Staying connected and open communication between DINZ and NZDFA was crucial in moving the industry forward, Paddy Boyd said.

through all activities, and I think that’s pretty exciting. What I’m hoping is that in a year’s time you’ll actually see how far we’ve come.”

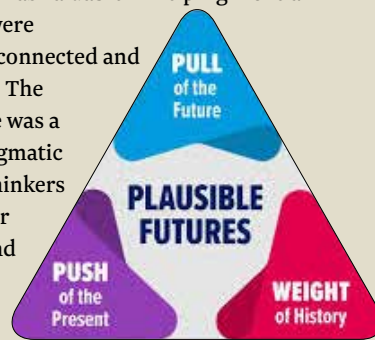
For **the other producer appointed member Paddy Boyd** achieving good communication was a driver for him standing for the board, and an area he would continue to advocate. He also aspired for greater connectivity between DINZ and the DFA “so we’re all moving in the same direction.”

Accountability was also important, to both levy payers and to the board.

“We need to be accountable for what we do and where we do spend our money.”

Board Games

The ‘triangle’ Mandy Bell referred to is The Futures Triangle. It was a group exercise at the NZDFA Chairs meeting which, on gathering around a black insulation tape triangle stuck to the floor, brought to mind ‘Twister’. But rather than getting tied up in awkward positions, participants placed themselves at one of the three vertices labelled ‘The Future’, ‘The Present’, or ‘The Past’. Those in the future group, about twenty per cent, were dreamers or visionary thinkers always on the lookout for opportunity. Those who lived in the present – the majority of participants – were practical and pragmatic; they lived in the here-and-now and got things done. The decision making of people who gravitated to the past, about one-third, were influenced by previous experience and history. The exercise was a simplistic way of viewing where an industry or organisation sat in terms of planning for the future, Bell said. Each thinking perspective was valuable in helping move an organisation forward, as were “connectors”, people who connected and assimilated all viewpoints. The exercise showed that there was a good mix of visionary, pragmatic and legacies-of-the-past thinkers but there was a need to “err towards future thinking and more open connectivity,” she said.



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The Legacy and Legend of Tim Wallis

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

The net gun gadgetry Sir Tim Wallis helped create made the capturing of live deer easy. But capturing his own life of deer-filled chapters is not so easy.

As personal friends **Tom Williams (GIB chair 1984 – 1994)** and **James Guild (NZDEFA chair 1988 – 1994)** said in a joint eulogy at Wallis's October farewell he was "a legend in his own lifetime," playing a starring role in the creation of New Zealand's commercial-scale feral venison, live recovery and deer farming industries.

"He was at the forefront of innovation – from the first trial to prove the viability of aerial recovery of shot feral deer in April 1963, through the development of export markets for both venison and velvet, the battles with Government bureaucracy to change the legal status of deer, even supplying the captured deer for the early experiments with deer farming at Lincoln College (University) – Tim and his companies Luggate Game Packers and Alpine Deer Group led the way," Williams and Guild said.

The pair noted that Wallis was at the forefront of venison recovery, but he also led the way in live deer capture, swapping bullets for tranquilizers and new technology to capture deer, setting in place the start of commercial deer farming.

His passion for all things deer went global and included one of the first air shipments of New Zealand deer in 1974, and the import of elk, red and some rare Pere David deer.

"He travelled frequently to South Korea, even living there with Prue for a few months while establishing business contracts and later

visiting China, and Russia all the while recording his adventures and even business conversations on his trusty video camera, a habit he kept all his life," they said.

Always on the lookout for the next opportunity, Wallis even tried farming deer in Russia until thwarted by an emergent and ruthless mafia.

The pair noted his mana and respected view on matters which proved invaluable in regulatory crises such as the Korean velvet adulteration crisis of 1984, the trade delegations following the turbulent period of perestroika in Russia, and later as China liberalised import protocols.

"Tim Wallis – what a man – there has been no one like him and there will never be another like him. Putting aside all his amazing attributes and achievements you are left with a person you would want as a friend."

Ken Drew

While serious accidents from his other big passion aviation reduced his involvement, he was "constantly scheming up new ideas to enhance the deer industry he helped create and which he loved."

Big Picture thinker

John Scurr (NZDFA chair 2001 – 2002 and DINZ chair 2005 – 2009) recalls one such scheme - the velvetting of 'free-range' stags from Scurr's Spotts Creek Station, an idea born out of Wallis's elk breeding business attempts in Russia.

"He said what about rounding up your stags from out the back, velvetting them and then releasing them back on the hill? I told him it was a bad idea, but I think it's a good example of how his mind worked."

Scurr described him as an "ideas man, always with the end goal in sight."

"It used to frustrate him when others couldn't see that same end point. I remember one of his classic lines when things were financially tough: 'the banks just don't understand...'"

Scurr and Wallis weren't close friends, but their shared aviation and deer farming interests, and close proximity to one another led to a rewarding and important two-way relationship.

"Tim got me started in deer farming. We had a one-for-one deal so that for any hinds recovered on our property I got one, then he got the next. No money changed hands and it's how we both built up our herds."

Wallis was a huge support to Scurr in the early 2000s when he was NZDFA chair and overseeing the amalgamation of the Game Industry Board and Deer Farmers Association into Deer Industry New Zealand. The behind-the-scenes words of advice and encouragement from Wallis helped greatly.

"Because he was local I could pop in and talk. I found him to be a strong mentor and huge supporter of the role I had. For me he played a pivotal role in helping to define the new (governance and operational) structure."



LEST WE FORGET: Tim and the family-owned Alpine Group acknowledged the 50 people – pilots and crew – who lost their lives during the era of aerial venison and live deer recovery with a stag crafted by Murray Matuschka and plaque unveiled in 2014 outside the Alpine Group headquarters at Wanaka airport.

He also provided valuable insight, based on his own experience, on how the New Zealand velvet industry could be reset, which led on to new selling and marketing structures, and more stable prices.

"I think one of Tim's big legacies was in the development of a more stable velvet industry."

Another legacy is hybrid venison production which literally got off the ground with the live recovery of Fiordland wapiti bulls by Wallis, Ken Drew, former Invermay Deer Group leader said.

"In the late 1970s I was keen to investigate the possible use of wapiti sires across red hinds to provide heavier, faster growing calves for venison production. I made contact with Tim about the possible live capture of a few of the best wapiti-type animals in Fiordland for relocation at Invermay."

Live capture required the approval of the Fiordland National Park Board, so Drew prepared a case and turned up at the Invercargill board meeting.

"There was strong opposition but eventually approval was given, and Tim captured about 10 of the best looking wapiti-type animals. He told me that he went through about 600 from the air before making his selection."

That was the start of an Invermay cross-breeding experiment and it led on to the establishment of the NZ Elk and Wapiti Society where Wallis was the inaugural president.

Although Wallis was on various deer-allied committees he was not one to be bound with meeting protocol and procedure, Drew said. He recalled an infamous special general meeting of the Elk & Wapiti Society to discuss a remit in which the society would join forces with the NZDFA.

“The subject was quite contentious as many members were opposed to the idea. Tim made no secret of his support for the project. Eventually the remit went to a secret ballot among the membership. When the scrutineers passed the results over to Tim it became clear that about two-thirds were opposed to the move. Tim looked up and said something like “That’s not what we want – how do we change it.?” There was a period of silence until Peter Elworthy stood up and said, “You can’t change that Mr Chairman, it’s democracy at work.”

Champion supporter

Wallis was endlessly in demand at field days and gave generously of his time to promote and share his huge knowledge of all things deer. **Bill Taylor (Southland DFA chair 2000 – 2003 and NZDFA chair 2008 – 2011)** says Wallis was a keen supporter of the Southland branch. His reputation and respect from farmers was reflected in the huge turnout to an AGM in the late 1990s where Wallis was guest speaker. Another crowd pleaser was the 2002 field day at Minaret Station hosted by the Wallis family. It was eagerly anticipated by branch members, and everyone was ready and waiting to board the Minaret barge for the journey across Lake Wanaka well ahead of the 10am departure.

“Most deer farmers are notoriously late by nature, but they were all there pumped up and enthusiastic,” Taylor says.

When one prominent Eastern Southland farmer questioned Taylor as to why the group was kept waiting, Taylor said he thought it was only fair to wait for Sir Tim and Lady Prue.

“Eddie had no more questions after that...those farmers lucky enough to make that trip will always remember and appreciate the hospitality shown that day.”

No single word could sum up his father, son Jonathan Wallis said at Wallis’s funeral and the closest was a phrase: “a wild charisma and an insatiable desire to live life to the full.”

Sir Timothy William Wallis chose to direct those unparalleled qualities in helping develop and grow from feral beginnings deer farming and its reputation in New Zealand and abroad. Those efforts are acknowledged and greatly appreciated by *Deer Industry News* and the deer farming fraternity. ■



PLAQUE REMINDER: Tim Wallis at the opening of Peel Forest Estate’s new deer shed in 2012. (Phil Stewart)



FLYING VISIT: Former AgResearch vet Colin Mackintosh caught up with Wallis when he made a brief flying visit at last year’s 50 Years of Deer Farming celebration at Invermay. (Phil Stewart)

Advice given and taken

Tim Wallis’s views and experience were respected but he was always prepared to listen to informed opinion, Ken Drew said, recalling the due diligence process Wallis engaged before buying Minaret Station in 1995.

“He invited about 25 people from all walks of life to Wanaka at his expense to discuss what options there would be in operating that huge station. He purposely invited some people with very different views to each other. He wanted some serious debate and some of the people didn’t even like each other.”

Wallis sat back under the chairmanship of a prominent lawyer and basked in the cut- and-thrust of the discussions.

“His knowledge of farming systems was modest, but he was always keen to listen to intelligent advice.”



GRASS ROOTS FARMING: Tim and son Nick in 2000 at a Minaret Station field day. He developed three deer farms: Criffel Game Park, Mararoa Station and Minaret Station.



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A Sure Thing?

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor



Is NZFAP Plus the ticket to less on farm auditing and smoother operations?

More streamlined auditing is definitely the end game of New Zealand Farm Assurance Incorporated (NZFAI), which owns both the NZFAP Plus and NZFAP certification programmes.

“What we’re working towards is national assurance programme that harmonises standards, eliminates duplication in auditing and provides NZ marketers a stronger position when negotiating overseas market access requirements and global market access,” NZFAI general manager Megan Mounsey-Smith says.

Both are voluntary market assurance programmes, with NZFAP-Plus the next step on from NZFAP certification.

NZFAP covers off the three fundamental components of origin and traceability, food safety and animal welfare. It includes deer specific standards relating to velvet removal, hard antler, housing/facilities and Cervena™. About 8000 beef, sheep and deer farmers are certified under the programme, and DINZ CEO Innes Moffat estimates about 80 percent of prime deer are from NZFAP farms.

NZFAP Plus is a higher level standard with three additional components to NZFAP: people, environment, and biosecurity.

“What we want to do is remove the unnecessary duplication of plans and reduce the auditing process for farmers.”

Megan Mounsey-Smith, NZFAI general manager

Megan Mounsey-Smith says that the environment component includes some freshwater standards, biodiversity, greenhouse gas and nutrient management requirements as well as stock exclusion and winter grazing.

She emphasizes that NZFAI is not - and will not be a regulator. Rather, the role of NZFAI is to enable market access and protect red meat and wool farmers ‘social license to operate’ through the administration of NZFAP and NZFAP Plus and provide NZ marketers a stronger position when negotiating with overseas customers.

Nor was it NZFAI’s role to lead discussions around possible market premiums to participating farmers, that was the role of member companies, who also paid the auditing costs of their suppliers.

A 10c/kg premium above venison schedule prices is the commonly quoted figure from venison farmers although processors and marketers are reluctant to commit to an actual amount.

DINZ deputy board chair Gerard Hickey, whose company First Light is a NZFAI red meat member, said that NZFAP Plus certification could in the future be aligned with certain venison contracts.

Silver Fern Farms on-farm sustainability manager Ryan MacArthur says NZFAP Plus is important for building a pool of suppliers that could respond to customer requests for products that met recognized sustainability standards.

“It’s about being proactive and staying ahead of the market by building up supply to leverage off.”

Silver Fern Farms has an extension team of five regionally based staff providing one-on-one support to signed-on NZFAP Plus suppliers to help them work towards certification in ‘bite-sized’ chunks.

MacArthur understands farmer pushback to increasing regulation but emphasises that NZFAP Plus is about market assurance and is driven by what overseas customers expect.

“For marketers it’s a balance of satisfying consumer demands with the right proof of standards.”

Costs and benefits

NZFAP Plus is great in theory but it’s the reality of achieving the standards, NZDFA chair Justin Stevens says. For Justin, the audits and meeting the standards need to be justified by recognition from customers.

He’s had six audits over the last 12 months for his deer and vineyard farm business. It’s more than usual due to a couple of one-in-three-year reviews, but the increasing amount of compliance is taking its toll.

However, for large scale operators, with admin support to help pull the requirements together, NZFAP Plus does add up. Dan Hall, farm manager of Lincoln Hills and part of Peel Forest Estate, says the promised premium payments are a compelling incentive given the 9,500 beef stock units run across 720ha. Lincoln Hills has had NZFAP certification for at least four years, and the step up to NZFAP Plus will be a good way to stay on top of environmental requirements, including FWFP regulations, and health & safety, training and wellbeing support.

“It’s setting us up to lead from the front,” he says.

Andy Bird, farm manager of Peel Forest Estate’s 3000ha home farm is also keen to get NZFAP Plus certification but says the biggest barrier is finding the time to fix any gaps in compliance and compile the supporting documentation, most of which is stored on Resolution.

Over the last couple of years Hall and Bird have overseen management changes and developments to farm within environmental limits. At Lincoln Hills, stags have replaced most of the commercial hinds because they worked better with the feed growth curve. There has been four kilometres of riparian planting, and more is planned along with the replanting of shelter belts damaged by high winds and flooding. At Peel Forest Estate

the construction of a 6000sqm barn for 1300 stags had been a positive game-changer for winter management.

In preparation for NZFAP Plus Bird and Hall have met with a Silver Fern Farms sustainability manager, and MPI's On Farm



GOING FOR GOLD: Farm managers Andy Bird (Peel Forest Estate) and Dan Hall (right, Lincoln Hills) are chipping away at NZFAP Plus certification which they regard as the gold standard market assurance programme.

Canterbury support Sarah O'Connell to talk about where more work and detail is needed.

Hall has set a tentative ready-for-audit date of mid-January, and Bird the end of February. ■

NZFAP vs NZFAP Plus

New Zealand Farm Assurance Programmes (NZFAP and NZFAP Plus) are voluntary and offered nation-wide. A three-yearly audit of both programmes is conducted by QCONZ and paid for by the supplier's meat company.

NZFAP includes deer specific standards relating to velvet removal, hard antler, housing/facilities and Cervena. The standards and the documented proof needed for audit are explained on nzfap.com, and a full copy of the Standard can be requested from your meat processor.

NZFAP Plus builds on NZFAP including standards for people, environment and biosecurity. The standards are aligned with regulatory requirements where there is market demand. It is a tiered programme made up of gold and silver requirements. Factsheet NZFAP Plus explains the process and what's involved.

Deer Industry New Zealand is an Associate Member of NZFAI and the five venison processors (Silver Fern Farms, Alliance Group, Mountain River Venison, First Light and Duncan NZ) are participating members.

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Rego woes with MyOSPRI and NAIT tags

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

When OSPRI's Clifton King mentioned at the DFA Chairs meeting the importance of getting "on-the-ground" feedback about NAIT tags he got more than he bargained for. Several farmers vented their frustration with MyOSPRI the online portal for ASD completion system and its failure to record and register the scanned NAIT tags of some animals.

There was a "big hole" in the system, Canterbury farmer Donald Whyte said.

"We scan the deer on to the truck and know they are registered but when we check (online) we see that some of the tags haven't registered and have fallen through the cracks somehow. Is it fair that farmers are fined when it's highly likely it's a systems error?"

King Country sheep, beef and deer farmer William Oliver agreed and said following up "lost" registered stock was time consuming, difficult and challenging.

"The response from NAIT is not helpful...it's not just the fine, it's also the grief it causes on farm."

"Money is being invested to upgrade it (MyOSPRI) "but it's not there yet which begs the question of what penalties and fines should be imposed in the meantime."

Innes Moffat

He said farmers needed assurance that the database was watertight before they were penalised.

King acknowledged the frustrations.

"Sadly I know enough to say there is too much of what you say going on. I'm committed to changing it, but it won't happen overnight," he said.

OSPRI is three years in to a \$30million upgrade of MyOSPRI, to create an integrated system comprising NAIT and disease management information. This will mean that farmers can take

care of their NAIT obligations, review disease management testing and laboratory information, and fill out ASD forms in one place. But getting the system up and running is taking longer than expected which according to OSPRI's 2022 – 23 Annual Report is due to "the complexity of the existing legal framework and system and challenges including data migration."

King said the new MyOSPRI should be operational for direct farmer NAIT data input by December 2024, and for third party providers such as FarmIQ from January to March 2025.

About 90 percent of cattle and deer are NAIT tagged and registered within the prescribed time, but only 65 percent have movement traceability across their lifetime, DINZ CEO Innes Moffat said. The fallout and difference between initial registration and traceability across life is attributable in part to tags which don't scan and register but there other reasons such as third party mismatches and reconciliation and the physical falling out of tags.

"It's difficult to pinpoint where the tags or information go missing and how tags are 'lost' from the system."

MyOSPRI in its existing form is not user friendly, he said. Money is being invested to upgrade it "but it's not there yet which begs the question of what penalties and fines should be imposed in the meantime."

DINZ chair Mandy Bell thanked King for noting the farmer frustrations around NAIT tag registration and asked OSPRI to consider transitional solutions for farmers over the next year while the new system was under development.

In follow-up questioning from *Deer Industry News*, Clifton King said OSPRI is prioritising NAIT in MyOSPRI to address many of the issues.

"Ongoing feedback from DINZ and farmers helps OSPRI rank the issues that need addressing in the new system.

"New education materials and tools are being developed to help farmers reconcile their records while the new MyOSPRI system is being developed," he said.



CHANGEMAKER: OSPRI's Clifton King said changes are being made to MyOSPRI to address NAIT issues but it won't happen overnight.

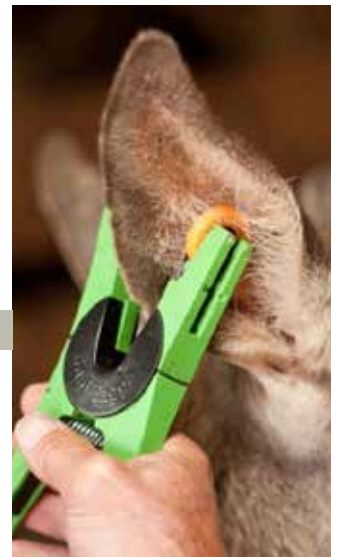


DOES NOT COMPUTE: Following up scanned tags which didn't register online was time consuming, difficult and challenging, William Oliver said.

Also, support was available from the website and customer support centre for farmers that experienced issues with the current NAIT system.

Moffat's advice to farmers is to front-foot problems by keeping OSPRI in the loop as soon as NAIT tag scanning and registering problems become obvious.

“It's important to reach out as soon as possible and provide details and records to help them identify where the problem has occurred. We (the deer industry) have made it clear we are supportive of EID and want it to work so we need to work with them (OSPRI) to help find the holes.”



EARMARKED FOR ACTION: OSPRI have noted and prioritised NAIT tag failure in MyOSPRI.

Fines

The infringement fee for an unregistered NAIT animal is \$400. It is MPI – not OSPRI – which imposes the fine under the NAIT Act Infringement Offences Regulations. Some meat processors impose their own penalties for untagged NAIT animals.

Disease Management

Clifton King covered off some of the contagious diseases and the important role NAIT would play in diagnosing and tracking them. For the deer industry Chronic Wasting Disease was the one most feared and for good reason – the incubation period varies between one and three-and-a-half years, but deer can become infectious within three months of contracting the disease.

“That means animals can spread disease for one to two years before they display symptoms and to make things work it's easily confused with other diseases,” he said.

Ongoing dry skin problems would not immediately lead a vet to suspect CWD, and it was hard to diagnose without an autopsy.

“Should Chronic Wasting Disease arrive in New Zealand it's likely to be here many years before it is discovered so the ability to trace back all the connections to see where it may have come from will be critically important.”

He said deer farmers could help NAIT to provide that additional layer of biosecurity by ensuring traceability records were up to date and readily available.

“Make sure that you tag and register animals, record animal movements and generally keep your NAIT records up to date.”

But he acknowledged the current information system made that difficult.

“We're committed to replacing the existing NAIT system with a

new MyOSPRI that will make it easy for you to comply with your NAIT obligations and also make more efficient use of your time.”

OSPRI function and funding

OSPRI manages TBFree and NAIT (National Animal Identification and Tracing programme). It was established in 2013 with the amalgamation of the Animal Health Board and NAIT. It's funded predominantly by the beef and dairy sector. The deer industry funds about two per cent of OSPRI's operating budget and last year contributed about \$1million to TBFree and \$240,000 to NAIT.

NAIT records the movement of cattle and deer from farm-to-farm, farm-to-meat processor for the purposes of managing animal health, disease outbreaks, food safety and biosecurity risks.

TBFree manages the eradication of bovine Tb. Although it manages pest control in Tb areas it is not responsible for control outside these areas. The goal of TBFree is to eradicate bovine Tb from NZ by 2055, and it was on track to do this, Moffat said. From 2005 until 2023 the number of Tb infected herds had reduced from 50 to 15. As at 30 June 2023 there were two infected deer herds compared to one herd at June 2022.

“We have had a good return on the money invested by farmer levies but it's going to be hard to get the last possum.”



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Optimism for Korean velvet market

Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Better than expected economic conditions, together with progress with health claims for a number of health functional foods including New Zealand velvet, are giving DINZ markets manager Rhys Griffiths reasons for optimism after a mid-October flying visit to South Korea.



TOASTING THE FUTURE: Griffiths (right) raises a glass of Yuhan Care's novel velvet extract with chief executive Joseph Kang (second from left) and other executives at the company's Seoul head office.

The main reason for Griffiths' trip to New Zealand velvet's top market was to make contact with KGC, Yuhan Care, Kwangdong and Hanpure, four key healthy food and health functional food companies, along with traditional customers and government officials.

Now that the 2023-2024 season has got underway, Griffiths learned first-hand that his comments, made to the NZ Deer Farmers Association's branch chairs in October, still rang true.

The underlying demand for New Zealand velvet in Korea was continuing, "with contracts being taken out by key customers and volume being committed to," he confirmed.

Acknowledging the marked increases for New Zealand farm input costs and increasing economic pressure on velvet's consumers, he found, "People buying at not far off where prices were last year. They hadn't dropped markedly in this uncertain world of massive costs of living, with New Zealand velvet competing for ever-squeezing discretionary income."

Deer velvet is being held up by MFAT as a 'model example' of New Zealand's high value, 'value-add' products on sale in Korea.

Griffiths, along with DINZ representative JongKyu Jang, also attended the Korean Society of Food Science and Nutrition (KFN)'s 'Sustainable Food Systems for Healthy and Value-Oriented Life' symposium in Busan on 20 October. Scientists and researchers presented their latest results at the forum.

Among those were Kwangdong, which reported approval for two new health functional food (HFF) claims by the Korean Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (MFDS) after successful human clinical trials. The novel complex extracts included New Zealand velvet, alongside other ingredients, are aimed at prostate function and anti-fatigue, with products aiming to be launched next year.

Another company, Yuhan Care reported positive research progress with Massey University and AgResearch towards registration for another new extract. If successful, that will also be launched next year.

The progress made for health functional foods claims was particularly "exciting," for Griffiths, who said, "it was another step forward to a new era for New Zealand velvet."

He pointed to recent Kantar research for New Zealand Trade & Enterprise (NZTE) looking at the health functional supplement market, which it said was, "an area of potential growth for New Zealand velvet exporters."

The sector had grown by 22 percent in 2022 to around NZ\$6 billion, compared with the previous year, driven by Koreans primarily, and increasingly, buying online for personal use, rather than for gifts, the report noted.

New Zealand velvet quality praised

Griffiths was "really pleased" to see, New Zealand velvet "front and centre" at the KFN symposium, with several of the presenters talking about it as a quality ingredient.

"Leveraging New Zealandness for health functional foods, is very much part of the DINZ velvet strategy which has three pillars: high-value HFF, healthy foods and traditional sectors," he explains.

Another mark of the esteem the New Zealand deer industry is held in by Korean officials was that representatives from MFDS made a rare trip to the NZ Embassy in Seoul from their base in Sejong City to meet with Griffiths and trade commissioner Stephen Blair.

They talked generally about how the Korean market was going for velvet, "and about our New Zealand farming systems, with us reinforcing to them why New Zealand velvet is so good," explained Griffiths.

Deer velvet is being held up by the New Zealand Ministry for Foreign Affairs & Trade (MFAT), as a 'model example' of New Zealand's high value, 'value-add' products on sale in Korea, its October market intelligence reported.

New Zealand processed velvet continues to have a competitive advantage, thanks to the NZ-Korea free trade agreement signed in 2015, with a tariff of 9.3 percent compared to the 20 percent duty paid by other countries, including frozen product. ■

2023 season started slowly

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

There's been a slow-ish start to the 2023 – 2024 velvet season. The sluggish start reflected a lack of confidence especially in China where economic indicators were still languishing.

“Consumer spending has picked up slightly but there's still high unemployment and a drop in real estate values which has contributed to a drop in consumer confidence,” PGG deer and velvet manager Tony Cochrane says.

Another dampener on demand was carryover stocks built up over the Covid years in both China and South Korea. The Korean economy was in better economic shape than China but velvet wholesalers were still “sitting on the fence”, and because it was the dominant market for Super A grades these prices had dropped by about 10 percent, Cochrane says. He noted that Korean imports of Russian velvet were less than half the volume of the same time last year.

“surprisingly quiet” but there had been a flurry of visitors from China, the first since Covid, who were keen to engage.

“They've enjoyed the opportunity and they've made their preferences clear which are for shorter well-cut velvet,” he says.

He didn't foresee any significant change in prices for Chinese grades from last year, whereas Cochrane says they are back by about five percent.

Despite the hiatus in velvet orders, Cochrane believes the long-term outlook for NZ velvet is good. Koreans knew the immune-boosting and anti-aging benefits of velvet and they prefer NZ over Russian product because of its consistent and validated quality parameters. Also, there was huge untapped opportunity in China.

The deer industry has invested time and money in developing markets and new healthy food products and it is unfortunate that the payback hasn't filtered through due to the disruption of Covid.

Cochrane reminds velvetters to cut earlier and cut round. “It means the velvet will be worth more and will maximise the income potential from regrowth.” ■

Cut earlier and cut round to maximise the income potential from regrowth.

“That tells us that the Korean market is slow but also that there is a preference for NZ velvet.”

Provelco's Ross Chambers says the Korean market was



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Opportunities being sought for venison

Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Venison companies are seeking new product opportunities in the quest for market diversification, NZDFA branch chairs were told.

DINZ board member Nigel Jones illustrated how Alliance Group is moving towards developing venison cuts for premium foodservice channels “to get it to the top-end,” by showing a video of recent successful activity in the UK. This initiative was supported “in a small way by DINZ” and is also being replicated in the US and other markets, the co-operative’s general manager supply chain and planning told deer industry leaders.

‘The Gathering’, brought together 10 of the UK’s most influential chefs during NZ Venison BBQ Week in mid-September at a ‘Tallow, Fire and Feast’ event to sample and get hands-on with New Zealand venison in a barbecue setting.

Chef Gary Jones, who had “been working in Michelin-star environments for the last 25 years,” said in the video, “Healthwise, venison’s a brilliant choice, it’s got a very nice texture to it, with a very clean flavour as well, that’s not as strong and gamey,” as wild venison.

Creating awareness of those differences for “top-end cuts in top-end markets” is a way to “start driving and pulling the volume through on a stable, steady demand,” said Jones.

Giving a quick market run-down, he noted Northern Europe still played an “important part of our season” with its ocean freight to Europe programmes “continuing to move fully subscribed” to the end of October. At the time he was speaking, the Alliance team was planning its supplementary airfreight consignments, which would take it through to Christmas. However, continuing late summer weather had the potential to hamper consumer demand in the region.



INFLUENCERS: The UK’s top chefs were given the opportunity to get hands-on with New Zealand venison and the latest Green Egg and Ofyr barbecue gadgets.

Strong demand for chilled venison in the region had seen processors paying up to \$10.50 per kg for product that will go into the high-value premium market, which was a good start to the season, DINZ board member and First Light’s group managing director Gerard Hickey later commented.

“Margins are being made by processors as well. Importers are relatively happy – except they can’t get enough product,” he told the branch chairs.

While “the market’s pretty healthy” for middles and “coming away recently” for trim products, legs have been a product “that we’ve struggled to place [in Europe],” Jones said.

“Obviously, we’ve got to make a return off the whole carcass,” he explained. So, the venison marketers are exploring niches for them in North America and China. Through the exercises and efforts there, we’re seeing an increase.”

Exports of venison to USA had increased by eight percent to 32 percent at the end of 2022, compared to the previous year, and six percent to China.

Alliance, which sells to top-end foodservice as well as retail in the US, is “relatively comfortable at the moment and optimistic about prices remaining reasonably stable and firm for venison, compared to some of the other species.”

All five venison companies are involved in the US retail programme, which recently won government funding through the Sustainable Food & Fibre Futures (SFFF) fund.

Look after the elk opportunity

One small activity within that programme, is supplying demand in the USA for venison from elk. Many North Americans – particularly the hunting fraternity – are familiar with elk and this provides an opportunity for elk/wapiti-cross animals to be grown to heavier weights to supply this valued niche.

Some of the companies have been supplying elk programmes for many years and efforts intensified recently with the launch of several new products. These include a promotional elk burger for Arby’s sandwich chain, supplied by The Lamb Company, a new elk range in First Light’s online store in the US and new Force of Nature’s products incorporating elk from Mountain River Venison.

This prompted plenty of discussion, with Elk & Wapiti Society



COMFORTABLE: Alliance is “relatively comfortable at the moment” about venison prices, Nigel Jones said.

(E&WS)'s Grant Hasse among the breeders asking, "what your criteria are for elk?"

Jones said Alliance requires that the elk bloodline is declared on the electronic Animal Status Declarations (eASDs). He called for farmers to "make sure you have your eASDs on if you're trying to put anything into our programmes because it's really critical that we have that traceability all the way through, otherwise we cannot put those animals through to the market that we're trying to develop."

He acknowledged definitions varied between processors, however, and a refinement in definition might be needed in the future, but that caution and care was also needed.

"We've got an opportunity that we need to make sure we look after," he said.

His sentiments were backed by DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat, who noted DINZ is aware of the need to develop this market carefully. It had canvassed marketing companies about how they defined elk in the markets they supplied as part of a consideration of elk claims. Some companies had been supplying New Zealand elk for many years that met customer expectations. Companies are putting elk products into retail and foodservice channels where sellers must comply with legal truth in labelling requirements.

"Companies do have methodologies that currently meet their customer's requirements. Our obligation is that everyone in the supply chain completes any statutory declarations fully. Let's make sure that we value the elk opportunity and support its development that meets customers' needs," Moffat said.

Individual value chains to target niches

Other valuable niches being explored by venison marketers are in Scandinavia and the Middle East, the latter of which First Light had chosen to develop over the past decade or so, Hickey said.

"It was new, there was no one else there, so we could create a year-round business that hadn't been seen before," he said.

Now, First Light "is pleased to be the only provider of halal venison globally. We've been able to set a price level there that works for us and works for our supply base."

Halal, 100% grass-fed, chilled, elk and antibiotic-free, among others, were the sort of individual value chains "that are out there," he said.

As the deer industry gets smaller and diversification progresses, it will become more "positively fragmented," he believes.

Rather than relying on the published national schedule, which largely covers product supplied for the commodity market, what will emerge are smaller groups of farmers supplying mobs of animals, say 15,000 "to be economical", for market niches that will "pay higher prices than the schedule." ■



TARGETING: niches with individual value chains is the way to go, Gerard Hickey said.



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Strong demand in Europe for New Zealand venison

Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Strong demand for New Zealand venison at the start of Europe's game season, despite limited supply, has been reported by DINZ-contracted chef Shannon Campell. Since September, he's been busy out and about in the region supporting marketers' by presenting New Zealand venison to tens of thousands of European trade buyers.

Even though the deer industry's strategic focus has shifted to the US and new emerging markets, Europe is still an important region for New Zealand venison, taking around half of venison exports, which were worth over \$86 million at the 2023 June year-end.

All of New Zealand's venison companies have been active recently promoting the product in the difficult Covid-recovering market, which has also been impacted by other world events. Most recently, the Israel/Hamas conflict has been added to war in Ukraine and global economic uncertainty, plus a lengthy European summer that was hindering consumption in the region.

Support for their activities came in the form of culinary skill and services from DINZ-contracted chef Shannon Campbell.

Between September and December, Campbell was involved in around 15 different events, working in the UK, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands alongside venison marketers' European partners at trade shows, house fairs, kitchen parties and in-store tastings and demonstrations.

All of the importers had experienced firm to strong demand for New Zealand venison this game season, he reported, "but had early problems with supply."

With lower numbers of animals and a late and wet start to spring in New Zealand, there was less venison to go around, especially middles, he explained.

Accordingly, prices were firm, and he had also noted a shortage of frozen New Zealand venison in the market.

Campbell's European calendar

In the UK in mid-September, Campbell was in the UK for a presentation, organised by New Zealand Trade & Enterprise, of Alliance Group's Pure South venison to 80-100 Waitrose buyers from around that country. The upmarket retailer has the "highest percentage share of any British retailer for venison, despite only having five percent market share overall," Campbell notes.

In Germany, demand for support has been particularly strong in Cologne, thanks to, "the constant drumbeat of promotion and close and personal interaction with chefs there."

His support was praised by Silver Fern Farms' global sales operations manager Glen McLennan as, "absolutely brilliant for his ability to tell our story and his skill as a chef."

Campbell assisted the company at the exclusive Clostermannshof restaurant's Kitchen Party on September 15, where 250 guests sampled a Silver Fern Farms venison dish, alongside others from several Michelin-starred chefs. The restaurant's chefs have also been involved in the city's Fine Food Days events.

"It's been an excellent way to build up brand recognition," he says.

Campbell was particularly pleased to see wholesalers which hadn't stocked New Zealand venison in the past, "really gearing up and promoting New Zealand venison to new clients."

One of those was Cologne-based company Möllers, who started to stock it alongside their regular wild game supplies from Germany, Poland and Hungary.

Working with Silver Fern Farms partner Klughardt at Möller's well-attended house fair, was "an excellent chance to get in front of 500 of their clients and present New Zealand venison," he noted. Many of the region's chefs, attended the event and were aware of New Zealand venison through previous events.

The major event in Campbell's calendar was the huge biennial Anuga food trade show, which took place in Cologne, Germany from October 6 to 11. After a few years of lower attendance figures, this year the show welcomed 140,000 trade visitors from 200 countries through its doors.

On its opening night, Campbell helped Silver Fern Farms at the marketer's biennial event for its top trade customers, that this year came from the UK, Europe, Middle East and China. Two Michelin-starred chefs Thomas Gilles and Julia Komp presented



REASONS TO BUY: Literature like this from Alliance UK for a presentation to 80-100 Waitrose buyers has been giving European trade buyers the reasons why they should choose New Zealand venison, over wild game and other country competitors.

“two beautiful venison dishes”, he said, followed by an evening event, with New Zealand venison on the menu.

“Not only have they done the event for us, but they’ve fallen in love with the product, and they’ve got it on the menus in their restaurants,” McLennan commented. “We’re starting to get a chef’s club in Cologne in the high-end restaurants that are starting to put our venison on their menu.”

The following night, Campbell was again on duty when DINZ provided support at the show for Klughardt’s special evening for 50 of the German importer’s most important customers.

During the show itself, Campbell’s team were busy serving samples to Alliance Group and Duncan NZ’s partners Bimpex Meats and Van Aerde’s invited guests. They also provided pre-prepared New Zealand venison dishes for serving on another Alliance partner Dutch importer Schoonderwoerd’s stand at the show.

Having dispensed with Anuga, Campbell was on the road again and by October 24 was in Belgium, taking part in a house fair with Alliance and Duncan NZ’s partner Bimpex for Carmans Meat wholesalers in Beerse, near Antwerp.

In two sessions of 40 guests each, he served a menu of New Zealand venison to chefs and restaurateurs to enjoy as well as giving a seminar around farming practices, nutritional values and a cutting demonstration to show, “how to get the best out of your carton on leg muscles,” he explained.

After a brief break, Frankfurt Airport on November 6 was the venue for wholesaler TIFA’s 50-year celebrations. It was a “great chance” to get in front of Klughardt and TIFA’s best customers, “and give them a taste of beautiful venison steaks and a seminar.”

Hamburg-based Taurus Meat Trading held a house fair for an expected 6,700 trade guests at the Gilde wholesalers on November 12. Its customers were given the opportunity to sample New Zealand venison from the DINZ stand. It was a “good opportunity to get to know the Taurus and Gilde teams.”

At the time of writing, Campbell was getting ready for two events to finish off 2023’s programme.

The first was setting up tastings and workshops with Chefs Culinar on November 16 to 18 at Citti Markt’s stores in the German cities of Lubeck, Kiel and Flensburg. Part of the distributor’s 50-year celebrations, each store was expecting 2,000 guests.

“We have a great chance to remain front of mind in a region where we already have a lot of brand recognition, thanks to the close collaborative work we have done there in the past,” Campbell says.

In December, Campbell will be in the Netherlands, helping marketers with the Kerst Inspiration events with wholesaler Hanos, a First Light venison importer. These “Christmas warm-ups” will be “crammed with customers seeking that something special for Christmas,” and will include tastings and culinary inspiration sessions in the kitchen. ■

Top right - DEDICATED: Shannon Campbell preparing his New Zealand venison dish at Silver Fern Farms’ pre-Anuga customer conference. Photo: Silver Fern Farms.

Right - ENGAGEMENT: September through to December has been all about marketers engaging with top customers, such as these Waitrose buyers for Alliance UK.



90-Day Review

It's usually the employer that leads a 90-day review, checking in with a new recruit to discuss any issues/concerns, and providing feedback on their performance as they settle into the new role. But Deer Industry News is turning the tables, asking new DINZ industry capability manager John Ladley to provide feedback on the deer farming industry based on his first three months.



WORKING SMART: John Ladley is prioritising his 2024 work load according to the DINZ strategy and focus areas.

How would you describe your first three months?

It has been really enjoyable, and the time has flown by. I have been kept busy with the variety of work which has included meeting a wide range of people in the industry from farmers to marketers and reconnecting with my existing network. I have been asking lots of questions and gaining a good understanding of the deer industry which has enabled me to fill the gaps in my knowledge and understanding. I have also been warmly welcomed, not only by the DINZ team, also those in the wider industry which has been humbling.

You've worked in the agribusiness sector for a number of years, how would you describe the 'vibe' of the deer farming industry?

I can sum it up in a few words: innovative, passionate, resourceful, positive and quietly confident.

You hit the ground running, attending two South Island industry roadshow events, where you got to talk with farmers. What did you learn?

Attending the roadshow events helped reinforce for me that the deer industry is in good heart, that the farmers involved are passionate and well engaged in the issues and challenges in front of them. What I picked up clearly was that farmers want the industry to be successful, and not be seen as niche. They also want deer to have a strong footing in a mixed species livestock system.

What have you identified as challenges, or opportunities for change and improvement?

One example is in the Quality Assurance area where DINZ have developed a well-regarded QA programme under the Deer QA banner. These cover a number of areas from behind the farm gate, transport to processing.

"What I picked up clearly was that farmers want the industry to be successful, and not be seen as niche. They also want deer to have a strong footing in a mixed species livestock system."

Recognising that the industry has matured and many of the processes are well embedded with the various stakeholders, there is an opportunity to consider how we deliver and manage these QA programmes. NZ Farm Assurance is one example of how we could utilise an existing industry programme and develop deer specific clip-on programmes. It could be a smart way of reducing the number or duplication of audits, whilst retaining integrity of product and ensuring value is being added.

Do you have ideas on the type and form of capability and extension needed to best support deer farmers?

Looking at what has been undertaken by DINZ in this area already highlights some great work - Advance Parties (AP's) have been a great extension tool to help farmers with practice change. I recognise that AP's are not everyone's cup of tea so its what else can DINZ provide to help farmers with transfer of knowledge and information. While this sounds simplistic, there is sound rationale and social science behind what extension activities can support farmers with practice change. Determining where DINZ can have the biggest impact and provide the support needed by farmers with the resources available is where my initial thinking is focused.

On commencing your role, you mentioned that one priority was to find ways to encourage people to continue farming deer and support new people by providing the right pathways into the sector. Where are you with that?

I have started to engage with some of the partners of DINZ, but this hasn't been an area that I have focused strongly on as yet. I have however started to give this some thought and we do have some fantastic cadet farms and organisations like Growing Future Farmers already providing some opportunities along with the

Next Generation programme supported by NZDFA and DINZ. For me it is how can we strengthen the existing relationships and utilise these to create opportunities for people to grow their knowledge and passion for deer farming.

What's on your 2024 To-Do list?

A To-Do list is rather daunting, especially when you are relatively new into a role. Given the breadth of my job description there will always be a sense of urgency to do things or respond to issues that arise. For me, being able to link these back to the DINZ strategy and focus areas will be a key part of how I prioritise my work beyond these first three months. The focus areas, all of equal priority are:

Quality Assurance

- Haemostasis Trial work is undertaken, and we have some recommendations on the next steps.
- Understanding the importance and the requirements for velvet removal and traceability to meet legislative requirements.
- The velvet traceability programme is well managed and delivering value for stakeholders.

Industry Practice and Capability

- I have a strong understanding of deer farming systems and the end-to-end value chain.
- The integrated farm planning project is implemented, and the

milestones are being achieved along with value added to our farmers.

- A work plan has been developed for the implementation of capability programmes.

Genetics

- That we have the right focus and tools and resources in either available or in development to meet the current and future needs of our farmers.

"...determining where DINZ can have the biggest impact and provide the (capability) support needed by farmers with the resources available is where my initial thinking is focused."

Thanks to those of you in the industry who have hosted me or endured me asking lots of questions over the past three months. I have appreciated your time and the sharing of knowledge. Hopefully I can put it all to good use as I continue to build my picture of a successful deer industry. ■



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New stress-less deer shed

Annabelle Latz, *Deer Industry News* writer

A new deer shed at Greta Canyon has made life more comfortable for both the stags and the Johnsons who farm them.

Dean and Marilyn Johnson

Tim and Olivia and daughter Twyla (3)

Greta Canyon is a contracting and velvet production farming business on 200ha of rolling hill country bisected by Greta Creek. The farm is situated on SH1, midway between Cheviot and Amberley, North Canterbury.

Stock: 660 MA English stags

The 247m³ steel framed shed with lots of natural light, curved walls, numerous gates and rubber matting is a safer and more pleasant work environment than the old shed.

“I feel more comfortable here, I work twice as fast and feel less tired because the stags flow better and the crush does the hard work,” Dean Johnson says.



TEAM PLAYERS: Dean and Tim applied their respective farming and engineering experience in the design and build of the shed.

Dean Johnson and son Tim have been farming deer together since 2017, as well as running a contracting business. It was the growth of the contracting business that led to the building of the new shed in 2021. Tim was spending more time off farm contracting during velvetting leaving more of the velvet removal to Dean in an aging deer shed. It was an adequate shed but not ideal for the stags who had to navigate tight spaces and were prone to slipping and sliding on wet concrete floors. The shed was difficult to clean and there was also ongoing maintenance of the timber ply walls. It was hard work for Dean and not sustainable, so the Johnsons decided to design and build a new shed.

The Johnsons are now in their third season of velvetting in the new shed and appreciate the benefits of the improved layout and design such as having a gate in nearly every corner of every pen.

The pair combined their respective experience in the deer shed project; Dean drawing on his almost 30 years of practical deer farming and Tim, an engineer by trade, applying his metal fabrication skills. Dean came up with a hand-drawn shed design which he passed on to Tim to fine-tune the fit-out and detail.

“I knew how I wanted it to work, I knew I didn’t want pinch points where a stag could try and get around,” Tim says.

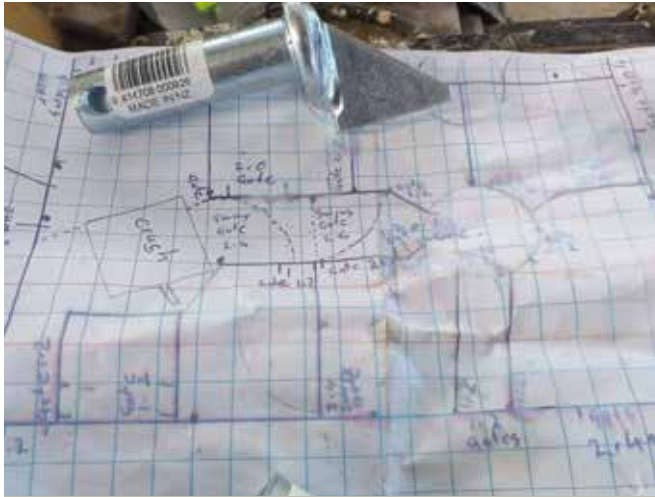
Eliminating the pinch points meant turning the straight gates and walls into curved ones and adding in a few extra escape gates.

At the beginning of winter 2021 the old shed was demolished so there was no turning back. The Johnsons were committed and worked solidly for the next three months on the shed building project. Local builders laid the concrete floor and took care of the exterior steel framing and roofing. The internal walls were then constructed as Tim set to work on the welder with the fabrication work, including the making of all the latches.

“Once you’ve done one you know how to do the rest,” Tim says.

The 19m x 13m shed was finished a week before velvetting began. It cost about \$165,000, excluding the Johnson’s labour, and took four tonnes of steel, 60kg of weld, and 300 hours of fabrication work. It was a hefty financial outlay, but there are numerous paybacks, Dean says. “Velvetting takes less time because the stags are calmer and move through the shed better, there’s less damaged velvet, and the shed is easier to clean and maintain.”

The Johnsons are now in their third season of velvetting in the new shed and appreciate the benefits of the improved layout and design such as having a gate in nearly every corner of every pen, so there’s always a quick exit if required. There are also push



GRAND DESIGN: The original sketch plan for the deer shed that Dean handed on to Tim to develop into a construction plan.

gates in the central race to make it easy to get the occasional uncooperative stag into the crush.

This year rubber matting was Dynabolted to the floor and has been a great addition, Tim says.

“They don’t rough themselves up so much and there’s less noise so they’re more relaxed.”

There are plans to put in a better crush and build a loading race.

Ringing the changes

Over three generations the Johnson family have evolved the Greta Canyon farm business from a marginal sheep and beef system to a specialist velvet and sideline contracting enterprise.

Dean’s parents Graham and Claire bought the sheep and beef farm in 1975. Dean and his wife Marilyn continued with sheep and beef when they took over in 1987. They added calf rearing to the mix, but drought and fluctuating lamb and beef prices made for a financially precarious existence.

“The lifestyle was great, but it was an uneconomic business,” Dean says.

He started out with deer in the early 1990s, his interest started after helping out a neighbouring deer farmer. Dean established a breeding herd, had a handful of stags and focused on venison production. Eight years ago their velvet buyer suggested they build the velvet side of the business. The Johnsons didn’t take a lot of convincing due to a brush with John’s and the fluctuating venison price. They swapped out hinds for another 50 English red stags and have grown the herd to 660.

Dean and Marilyn started a contracting business in 1997 to supplement farm income. It’s now run mostly by Tim (36) and part-time staff and includes three round balers, two wrappers, four tractors, a medium square baler and a direct drill.

Velvet and contracting have made a financially sustainable business for the Johnsons. Consistent velvet prices over recent years have provided greater confidence and certainty.

“Now we can spend money on improvements and employing staff. We still have to be careful, but we can do stuff,” Tim says.



COMFORT-PLUS: The new shed is a much more comfortable working space and in winter it doubles as parking space for the Johnson’s contracting gear.

Good Fit

After velvetting the stags go on to maintenance rations, cleaning up tag where necessary. Post rut they get free-range grazing of a 12ha fodder beet block, with a pasture run-off and supplements of balage and palm kernel until mid-September. They have plenty of space, which stags appreciate after the rut Dean says, and there’s no pugging issues.

The pasture paddocks get an 80kg/ha dressing of sulphate ammonia in mid-August, providing a growth boost and plenty of feed for stags in the lead up to velvetting. In November seven to eight hectares of grazing maize are sown, it’s an insurance policy for dry summers, providing reliable feed in January if needed.

Over the next three years they’ll do more fencing and increase the number of velvetting stags to 800.



GOOD FIT: Velvet stags fit in well with the growth and feed curve and can tolerate the North Canterbury summer-dry conditions.



PLASTIC FANTASTIC: The walls are lined with 9ml plastic ply, made from recycled balage wrap, and attached to the steel frame with counter-sunk screws. The plastic walls cost about \$19000, almost double the cost of timber ply, but the flipside of the investment is no splintering and damage or touch-up painting.

Deer shed design

The deer shed and yarding system must be designed and constructed to provide a safe and practical work environment for both animals and handler. Waikato deer farmer Ross Moore, also a fitter and turner, rebuilt his deer shed within an old woolshed and has overseen the makeover and construction of two other deer sheds. The following are practical tips and considerations based on his own experience.



1. **Look out:** Spend time looking around other sheds and asking those who work in them what works well. “Go and look at other sheds suitable for your system and ask lots of questions, it’s good to talk your ideas through with another deer farmer.”
2. **Plan it:** Sketch a plan, revisit and amend as necessary for the efficient flow of deer.
3. **Steel it:** Construct with a steel rather than timber frame if possible. “Steel doesn’t warp like timber and a steel frame is easier to cut, change and move if necessary.”
4. **Tread lightly:** Rubber floor matting is preferable to a concrete floor. It’s more expensive but the health and safety handler/deer benefits are priceless and include reduced noise, the reduced likelihood of deer slipping over and being bruised or damaging their velvet, and easier cleaning.
5. **Bolt it:** Dynabolt posts to concrete floor rather than concreting them into the ground. “If you need to change the shed you don’t have the difficult job of cutting new holes in the concrete to reposition posts.”
6. **Curves not corners:** Eliminate sharp edges to reduce velvet damage and bruising. In the Moore’s shed the fold-back doors have pivots made from 100ml pipes and round pipes are used as buttresses to reduce rub areas.
7. **Go with the flow:** good drains and drainage flow are essential and for velvetting a blood collection trap for easy disposal is worth considering.
8. **Shop around:** Fit-out costs can be reduced by buying second-hand. A good example is the dairy shed rubber matting that Moore bought. “We got it for half the price of new matting, and it wasn’t worn so it’s worth keeping an ear to the ground.”
9. **Spend to save:** Keeping the crush room clean is a number one requirement which Moore addressed by using food grade plastic sheeting around the walls. “It’s more expensive but it’s easy to clean and means we don’t have to repaint the walls every couple of years.”

His final word of advice is to make changes rather than make do with a shed that doesn’t work and flow.

“Don’t persevere with a shed that’s not right for your system, make the changes sooner rather than later.”

For further advice on shed design, including legal requirements and minimum standards, go to: deernz.org.nz/deer-hub/handling-and-welfare/handling/shed-design ■

Proof Is Truth: Melior Deer tops AgResearch across-breed liveweight gain trial.

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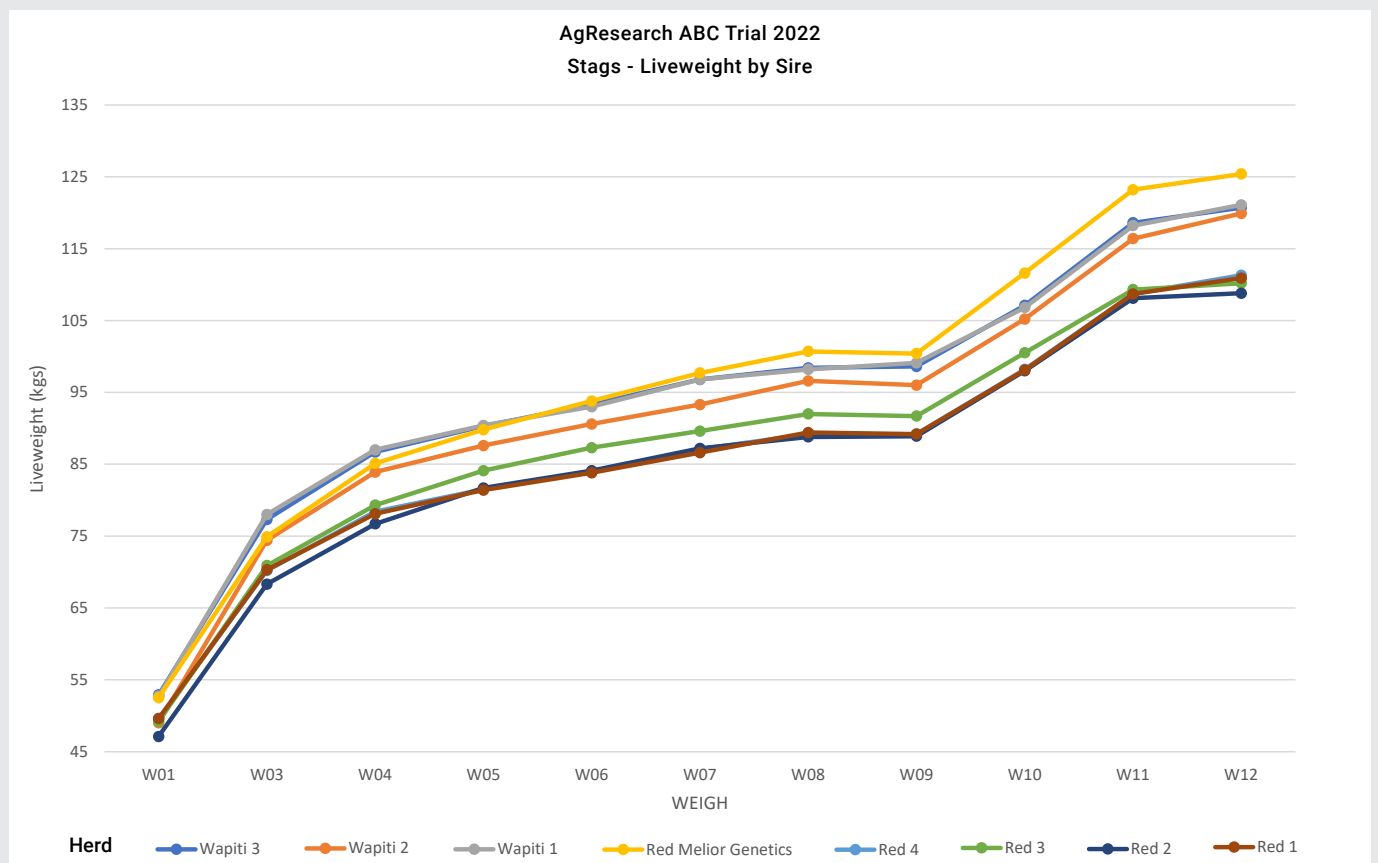
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Calves for cash flow

By Lynda Gray *Deer Industry News* editor

Calf rearing is helping bankroll and build the Innes family's velvet herd.



FOCUSSED: Sam and Annie's goal is to build their velvet herd without creating more debt.

Sam & Annie Innes and family Matthew (12), Tom (10), Henry (8)

Velvet production and calf rearing on 125ha of medium-rolling country at Levels Valley, between Pleasant Point and Timaru, South Canterbury.

Stock on hand: 1 December 2023

- 700 4-month-old dairy and dairy-cross bull calves
- 350 MA stags
- 100 MA hinds
- 400 four-month-old bull calves



CASH COWS: calf rearing has provided much needed cash flow over the last two years.

Specialist velvet production is the long-term goal for South Canterbury deer farming newcomers Sam and Annie Innes. But in the meantime, they're running a hybrid velvet and calf rearing system to help pay down debt.

"Velvet is our main income, but it comes all at once which is difficult for us when we need cash flow," Sam explains.

The Inneses have a contract arrangement with a local pig farmer, who supplies the four-day-old calves and the feed. Sam and Annie's job is to raise the calves in nine to 10 weeks to 100kgLW for supply to a North Island finisher. In the first year (2022) they raised 400 calves, it was a huge job and a stressful juggling act for Sam during the thick of velvetting. But they got the job done and the cash reward incentivised them to sign up again this year for an intake of 700 calves. It's been a more streamlined process with the Inneses familiar with what's involved. A specially built rearing shed has also helped along with hired help for feeding and the more condensed arrival of the calves. But regardless, calf rearing is a "mountain of a job", Sams says. "But it's a great fit for us in the meantime."

Sam's had a fascination with deer for as long as he can remember, but his pathway to farming them has had some interesting twists and turns. His deer dealings up until 2020 were mostly at a sky-high level, starting out as a helicopter culler for Harvey Hutton before gaining his own helicopter pilot's licence in 2002. The aviation gene runs strong within the Innes family, Sam's father, two brothers and several cousins are all aircraft pilots. His helicopter pilot ticket was the start of a varied 18-year career which took him to Australia, Fiji, Antarctica, and the sub-Antarctic islands. He met and South African-born Annie in 2007.

The family lived in Te Anau for the final years of his commercial pilot career working for Hannibal Hayes. The work included tourist flights, search and rescue work, as well as culling for the Wapiti Foundation. Sam and Annie set their sights on self-employment and seriously considered buying a helicopter business but got nervous about both the financial and time commitment.

"It would be all-consuming for me so not ideal with our young family," Sam says.

As events played out the timing of the possible investment – immediately before Covid shutdown – in a largely tourist-based business would have been disastrous. When Annie asked Sam about a possible Plan B business idea, he mentioned his deer farming ambition. Sam was born and raised on Black Forest Station in the Mackenzie Country but had limited practical farming experience. Annie was familiar with wild antelope and deer from her working in the Kruger National Park but had no farming experience. But rather than angst over what they lacked they forged ahead looking on Trade Me for some likely

deer farming country. The 125ha farm at Levels Valley came up and when the couple followed up for more information, they discovered it was owned by a former Timaru Boys high school classmate of Sam's. The farm ownership deal was done more or less the same day the country was shut down by Covid. That left the Innes family stuck in Te Anau 500 kilometres from their new home and business for about two months. When they finally made the move attention turned to generating cash for the purchase of deer.

"I think that quality is going to become more important especially as the industry diversifies away from traditional end uses to more value-added end uses such as healthy and functional food products."

"Getting started and buying the farm stretched us financially so at the start we had no money to stock it," Sam explains.

Their solution to get cash flowing was leasing the farm to a neighbouring lamb trader who employed Sam to help manage the intense lambs-in, lambs-out system. It was relentless work and over 12 months they grazed and traded 45,000 lambs on the two farms. The Inneses had intended to lease the farm for two years but pulled the pin after one and bought some deer.

They formed a herd buying 50 ex-stud in-calf hinds from Peel Forest Estate and 140 stags from Bruce Lee in Stavely in 2021.

Moving forward and next steps

Getting started in deer farming and moving forward over the last three years is an achievement the Inneses are justifiably proud of. They've got ahead financially through smart thinking (leasing), hard graft (calf rearing), and the support of mentors such as the Peter and Jema Swann.

"Peter plays a valuable advisory role and he's crucial when it comes to making genetic decisions," Sam says.

Also, part of his go-to team are Hamish Smith and Henry Pearse, both deer farmers happy to share practical advice.

Sam does most of the farm work but Annie, who works in an accounting support role for a Timaru chartered accountancy firm, helps out on-farm when possible and is perfectly placed for managing the farm budgeting and financial side of the business using Farm Focus. She prepares twice yearly budgets.

"It's crucial for us given the size of our mortgage and the increase in interest rates," Sams says.

When the couple bought the farm in 2020, they used a "worst case" interest rate scenario of 6%, never thinking for a moment that within three years it would be 9.5%. They're concerned about the continued creep in interest rates and as a further cash flow generating option have bought 230 of this year's reared calves to carryover and sell at 200kgCW in April. They are also considering the raising of autumn-born calves.

"We're focused on moving ahead without creating more debt."



SUPREME: The former Glenfiddich herd produces overgrown (supreme) grade velvet.

The next step – and a pivotal one - was meeting and buying from Glenfiddich Deer owners Peter and Jema Swann 10 cull stags in 2022. Peter mentioned at the time his intention to retire and sell the Glenfiddich herd in the not too distant future. Sam indicated that he might be interested and when Peter phoned him several months later it didn't take too long to negotiate a purchase arrangement for the 100 hinds (August 2022), followed by 150 stags in January 2023.

“Us getting that herd was a game-changer and we're forever grateful to Pete and Jema for trusting us to take on the herd, but at the same time it was important to them to sell the herd as a going concern.”

The Glenfiddich herd is unique, being the only group of genetically pure NZ red deer descended from Rakaia and Opuha bloodlines. The Swann's velvet breeding emphasis over 25 years was to grow low ash content, higher grade velvet for contract supply and processing into powders and capsule extracts. That velvet breeding philosophy and direction sits well with Sam.

“..we're forever grateful to Pete and Jema for trusting us to take on the herd..”

“Peter's focus had been primarily around quality rather than weight and style and I think he was ahead of his time in that respect. I think that quality is going to become more important especially as the industry diversifies away from traditional end uses to more value-added end uses such as healthy and functional food products.”

The Levels Valley farm is generally well set up for deer farming. The infrastructure is in place, although some of the fencing needs replacing. Shelter belt planting is planned, cash permitting.

At takeover the farm was planted in kale. It was sprayed out and replaced with an Expo perennial-white cover mix which, after an initial weed problem, is performing well. A 25ha area of Tabu Italian ryegrass, provides quality winter and spring

feed for the velvet stags. Stag feeding is kept simple: balage, pasture and oats with some high mineral nuts through the winter, then on to the Italian ryegrass about a month before velvet harvest.

“We don't winter on crop, but we'll have to revisit that as we increase velvet stag numbers.”

Sam does all the velvetting, harvesting about two tonnes from 350 stags (5.71kg/head). Long-term he's targeting similar per head production to what Peter was achieving.

Another goal is to run a single herd – rather than separate Glenfiddich and Lee/Peel forest Estate mobs – comprising 350 stags and 100 recorded hinds. That will take time and consideration of how to maintain the integrity of the Glenfiddich mob which has had a closed genetic status for the last 35 years. ■



FOCUS: Sam Innes says his financial focus is to move forward without creating more debt.



IDEAL: The climate and growth cycle on the farm fits well with velvet production. (Peter Innes)

The Year of the Elk & Wapiti

Premium prices over the last year for elk/wapiti velvet, trophy heads and hybrid venison are the hard-and-fast proof of the terminal sire-plus advantage.

“Elk and wapiti are on the rise,” John Falconer says.

“The premium prices for specialist elk/wapiti-based venison contracts for the North American market, the velvet price premium for elk/wapiti velvet, and elk trophy demand that outstrips supply is the dollars and cents proof of that.”

Investment in Clachanburn elk and wapiti genetics sets deer farmers up for a three-way income stream, he says.

“We breed big strong bulls that perform and consistently deliver fast growing hybrid progeny and heavy-weight velvet and there’s also their residual value as a trophy head animal. That trifecta – venison, velvet and trophy – is our point of difference.”

Clachanburn-bred trophy head animals are attracting an international following of hunters, due to their outstanding heads and also the new hunting lodge perfectly placed in the rocky outcrop hill-country of Rough Ridge in the Maniototo, near Ranfurly.

“We’ve fast become a one-stop shop for discerning international trophy hunters and it’s clear that our elk and wapiti trophy animals are more than meeting their expectations.”

John attributes Clachanburn’s three-way income advantage to a breeding programme focused on genetic selection and management for the “real world”.

“Our sale bulls spend most of their first three years on the hill-country. They’re not pampered, fed deer nuts or palm kernel so buyers can be sure they are true three-way performers.” ■

Advertorial supplied.



OUTSTANDING: Clachanburn trophy head bulls.



LUXURY LODGINGS: The Falconer’s new Waitoi Creek hunting lodge has fast become a popular stop-off for discerning international trophy hunters.



NZDFA Executive Committee: Chair Justin Stevens, Jamie Ward, Mark McCoard, Karen Middelberg

Win-Win event

Tony Leggett, *Deer Industry News*, writer

The Hawke's Bay Velvet Competition in mid-November was a winning velvet and social event for local deer farmers.

Event organiser Evan Potter said the competition dinner provided a much needed excuse for local deer farmers to take a break after a very challenging year to celebrate with the winners and place-getters. The late afternoon showing of the entries was followed by a DFA branch-subsidised evening dinner attended by nearly 80 people at a Hastings barbeque restaurant venue.

"Local deer farming people really embraced the opportunity to get off the farm and enjoy a night out. The cyclone earlier in the year smashed the region and many of our branch members will be working for a long time to fully recover from its impact," he said.

A small group of farmers made the most of the night out and lingered on at the venue long after most had left for home.



LOOKING GOOD: Grant Charteris with the 13.96kg head of seven-year-old Lazarus, the Champion red velvet winner.

Trophy winner Grant Charteris says he was the only sensible one among them but there are some photographs available that reveal the group's identities and their amusing antics.

Enough said – at least till next year's competition prize giving!

Winners

Tikokino deer farmers Grant and Sally Charteris continued their strong run of success winning the Champion of Champions trophy and picking up several class placings.

Their Champion of Champions trophy-winning entry weighed 9.10kg and had earlier caught the eye of this year's judge, PGG Wrightson Deer and Velvet Manager Tony Cochrane, who selected it as his winning entry in the four-year red velvet class.

Charteris was delighted with the judge's call on the Champion of Champions trophy, especially after naming the stag 'Irwin' as a tribute to the late Phil Irwin who passed away last year after decades of service to deer farming in the Hawke's Bay region and nationally.

"Phil had such a big impact on deer farming so to have named the stag that produced the Champion of Champions trophy-winning velvet, after him, is a big thrill for us," Grant said.

Irwin's name also lives on in a class contested for the second time at this year's competition called 'The Pretty Boy' in recognition of his consistent emphasis on eye appeal of velvet when advising deer farmers and in the many competitions he judged throughout the country.

The 'Pretty Boy' trophy is funded by the Spiers Family Trust and was won by an impressive entry from Linda and Evan Potter's Waipapa property. Coincidentally, the Potters also picked up first place in the night's 'Fugly' class for mis-shaped, quirky velvet entries.

Other class winners at this year's competition were entries from Longbrook Deer, Temco Ag, Ohurakura Deer, and Caroline Smith.

Competition judge Tony Cochrane was impressed by the quality of entries in every class in what he described as a challenging season for velvet growers.



JUST LOOKING: Mark Brady (left) and Rupert Gaddum, Rangimoe Station.



PRETTY BOY: Velvet competition judge Tony Cochrane (right) presents the Pretty Boy trophy to Evan Potter.



WINNER: Caroline Smith, pictured with deer agent Paul Lampp, won the First Light sponsored Meat Head class.

“In my judging, I focused on the commercial value of the entries rather than just cosmetic appeal, and I was particularly focused on the top part of the stick and not pushing length too much.”

“I wanted to send a clear message to velvet growers that weight will not always win over quality,” he said at the evening’s prize giving event.

He says China holds the key to a lift in international velvet prices this season. Stocks in the market are higher than normal for this time of year but the Chinese buyers also prefer smaller, shorter velvet than their Korean competitors, and this type of product comes on stream later in the velvet season.

“I’m hoping we see a lift in price by later in the velvet season, especially when that Chinese product comes into play,” Cochrane said. ■



CHAMP: Grant Charteris, Forest Road Deer, winner of the Champions of Champions trophy and late night party goer at the Hawke’s Bay velvet competition.

Class winning results from the 2023 Hawke’s Bay Velvet Competition:

Class 1

Champion Red Velvet (HBF Dalgety Trophy): Forest Road Farm (13.94kg)

Class 2

Five Year Red Velvet (Vet Services HB Trophy): Longbrook (9.91kg)

Class 3

Three Year Red Velvet (Wrightson Trophy): Temco Ag Ltd (8.56kg)

Class 4

Four Year Red Velvet (National Livestock Trophy): Forest Road Farm (9.10kg)

Class 5

Best Three Heads (Maranoa Trophy): Temco Ag Ltd (33.15kg)

Class 6

Provelco Double: Ohurakura Deer

Class 7

Best Local Red Velvet (Don Robinson Memorial Trophy): Longbrook (3yr 7.35kg)

Class 8

The Fugly: Waipapa

Class 9

Super Heavy 10+kg Non Traditional Velvet (Williams Family Trophy) Ohurakura Deer (16.03kg)

Class 10

Champion of Champions Trophy: Forest Road Farm (9.10kg)

Class 11

The Pretty Boy (Phil Irwin Trophy): Waipapa

Class 12

The Meat Head (sponsored by First Light): Caroline Smith

Justin Stevens, NZDFA Executive Chair
jrstevens@actrix.co.nz



Infectious lameness in deer

Pania Flint

In response to farmer-initiated concern about the difficulties in dealing with lameness in deer, two workshops attended by about 40 vets and farmers were held in July 2023 to gather experiences and ideas on how to manage this issue. The following is a summary of the discussions.

Three main types of lameness:

1. Acute lameness often resulting in death in weaner deer, similar to the well described “necrobacillosis” disease.
2. A chronic lameness cause by severe infection in adult deer resulting in weight loss and foot deformity with slow recovery.
3. Lameness caused by white line disease and development of foot abscess.

In nearly all cases, outbreaks of infectious lameness affected 5 to 20 percent of the mob.

Necrobacillosis in weaner deer

Fusobacterium is a normal gut microbe in the deer’s intestine. It can be shed in the faeces during times of stress and although it does not survive well in the soil or pasture it may be transferred to deer through wallows and muddy yards. It can enter the deer’s body through damaged skin such as abrasions, cuts and/or other bacteria that infects the foot. Once established, Fusobacterium causes cell death and tissue destruction and can quickly enter the bloodstream and spread to internal organs. There are different species and strains of Fusobacterium and it appears that some are more harmful than others.

Key observations

- Lameness is caused by foot abscesses above the claw area or lesions that typically track from the bottom of the hoof, often at the toe, or between the claws.
- Most cases occur during autumn and early winter, around the time of weaning and are often associated with yarding or trucking.
- Risk factors include wet weather, new concrete, exposed mesh, fence wires, indoor wintering, and bringing new animals on to the property.
- There is a rapid spread in a mob and rapid progression to death.

Treatment

- Good response to antibiotics if treated early, within the first two days, poor response to antibiotics if left more than three to four days.
- Some good results with foot bathing, others found it was not helpful.
- Some good results from rubber matting in sheds, others are still having problems despite matting.

Foot and pastern infection in older deer

Key observations

- Can occur at any time of the year but more common in stags and often worse during the roar, and wet weather.
- Not necessarily associated with yarding or transport.

- Spreads within a mob, but not between mobs if they are kept in separate areas.
- Symptoms include swelling and deformity of the foot and soft tissues, often with bleeding and ulceration.
- Weight loss but not usually death.

Treatment

- Poor response to antibiotics, although one farmer reported very good results with intramammary antibiotics inserted directly into the diseased foot tissues (usually between the toes) - note that this is off-label use.
- Slowly comes right but some deer may need to be euthanised due to severe hoof deformation and welfare concerns.

White line disease and abscess in stags

This disease primarily affects adult stags. There was not very much discussion on this condition and further follow up is warranted.

Key observations

- Penetration of the white line – where the hoof wall and the sole join – causing lameness and infection which can lead to the development of dark pus lesions.

Management Strategies

Mixed results with the following strategies:

- Checking paddocks for sources of injury and filling in mud holes.
- Fitting physical and visual barriers on fences leading into the yards to prevent wire cuts.
- Putting zinc sulphate around troughs.
- Installing rubber matting, either the whole shed or at pressure points such as exit ways and in the crush. This has drastically reduced the incidence of lameness on some properties, whereas others continue to have issues despite rubber matting.
- Cleaning the shed to reduce manure load.
- Ensuring shed drainage is efficient and working.
- Get a ‘second set of eyes’ - ask a vet or knowledgeable farmer to look and assess the system and situation.

Treatment

- Foot bathing.
- Antibiotics - early treatment is critical. Tetracyclines have traditionally worked if given early. Other options that have been successful include ceftiofur (Excede), tilmicosin (TilmoVet) and lincomycin/spectinomycin (Lincospectin).
- Isolate affected animals or at least do not mix affected and unaffected mobs. ■

Pania Flint is a Manawatu vet.

Lochinvar Wapiti Farm

A 40-plus year proven track record.

The Carran name is synonymous with wapiti farming. Chris and Helen Carran started farming wapiti in the Te Anau basin in 1982 forming a foundation herd from live captured bulls and cows recovered by arrangement from Crown-owned Lands and Survey land. They have concentrated on wapiti breeding ever since building their herd and genetic base with strategic purchases over the years including the 150 Fiordland wapiti bulls from the late Evan Meredith's dispersal sale in the mid-1990s. Nowadays the wider Carran farming enterprise covers 891ha carrying 3000 wapiti breeding cows plus progeny finished to prime weights and stud bulls.

A significant milestone in the development of the Carran family's business was the purchase in 2000 of Lochinvar Station, an easy 10-minute drive from Te Anau, to establish a deer unit plus an on-farm stud sales base. Chris and Helen have lived there ever since but due to changing circumstances have made the decision to offer for sale a 154ha deer block which includes excellent deer handling and selling facilities and an attractive home.

It is the end of an era for Chris and Helen but the next generation - Ross, Kerry, and Charlie are committed to wapiti and will

ensure their longstanding clients have ongoing access to Lochinvar genetics through privately negotiated sales of bulls and surplus stocks.

Property Brokers are privileged to be offering for sale on behalf of the Carran family this attractive and well set-up specialist breeding, finishing and stud selling unit. ■

Advertorial supplied.

Deer Industry News

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An attractive and well set up property

Lochinvar Wapiti Farm, Te Anau

The property has been utilised primarily as a specialised unit for breeding, fattening and provision of velvet from an established Wapiti herd.

It is well set up for stud sales in the excellent deer handling facilities which are part of a multi purpose building including workshop and machinery cover with the adjacent yard providing an area for silage and storage of supplement.

The contour and extensive shelter creates a character property and its subdivision and standard of access allows for ease of management and enables options for all forms of livestock farming and provision of supplements. A four bedroom home of schist and weatherboard exterior adds an attractive feature to the farm.



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Tomorrow's Deer progeny: adaptability to stressors

Jamie Ward, AgResearch scientist – AgSystems and Reproduction

The deer breeding herd at Invermay is fully recorded on DEERSelect and called Tomorrow's Deer herd. They are also a 'science' deer herd, and as such our intention is that our breeding program and management will help breeders, farmers and the industry produce better deer and products for tomorrow.

Over the year we have been monitoring all of our AI progeny and have evaluated them through a couple of experiments looking at the way different animals, sire lines or breed-types might respond to environmental stressors. These environmental stressors were primarily based around nutrition, the first being pre vs. post-rut weaning (March, April, May), and the second nutrition coming out of winter and into spring (mid-July to mid-September). This was in the third consecutive year of a La Nina weather pattern.

"Managing late-winter/early-spring pastures was challenging for mobs of 80 in 3.5ha paddocks. In the end there was a small difference between treatments."

The weaning-type trial was pretty straight forward to manage the only fun part drafting out stags during the rut during calf weighing, but we chose our gentleman stags for the post-rut groups. Nutrition during late winter was more challenging as we operated this at pasture and with a Leader-Follower system. Leader-Follower gives the first mob the best pasture < 1800 kgDM/ha and the followers get the second go at it. Mixed sex and mixed-breed (red and wapiti-crossbred) mobs made this more challenging as the follower groups particularly were a competitive situation.

Last month the males were all killed, as were the wapiti-cross females. Carcass weights were recorded and rumen samples taken to analyse the rumen microbiome as in other species this has been shown to correlate with methane outputs. The trial hasn't been appropriately analysed yet, but we have summarised some of the raw data at a very high level of treatment type balanced by sire-breed and sex-adjusted per-treatment to simplify things to a single number.

In the weaning trial the pre-rut weaned calf (sex adjusted) average after three months on 23 May was 72.4 kg and the post-rut weaned group 79.8 kg. This was a weight advantage of 7.4 kg total or 49 g/day, during the next month the post-rut weaned group took a growth check and so in June their liveweight advantage was only 6.1 kg over the pre-rut weaned. All their dams were naturally mated to red stags the average conception rate was 95% and essentially the same for each weaning type 96% pre-rut, 94% post-rut, but the post-rut weaned dams conceived 12 days later on average (12 April vs 21 March) and were 8.7 kg lighter and

almost 1.0 BCS lower than the pre-rut weaned group, so there were definitely swings and roundabouts and it is always important to look at the whole hind-calf unit or system.

The late-winter to spring nutrition trial had all animals re-randomised from weaning treatment and allocated to Leader (high) or Follow (low) nutrition treatments. Managing late-winter/early-spring pastures was challenging for this trial for mobs of 80 in 3-5ha paddocks. In the end there was a small difference between treatments, but it might not be statistically significant. The sex adjusted average for the Followers was a 132 g/day gain and the Leaders 158 g/day, which was a difference of 1.3kg (89.8 vs 91.4 kg) over the two month period. The females appeared to be disadvantaged in the mixed-sex mobs in both treatments. The growth rates for our Followers were close to our targets, but the Leaders were too low. The 1.3 kg difference was still there a month later on October 10, and the sex-adjusted eye-muscle areas were quite similar: Leader 30.14 cm², Follower 29.65 cm². The pasture really started growing well in the last two weeks of the trial, and at that time it was hard to sufficiently restrict the Follower diet. A good reminder that from mid-August your young deer are primed to take off.

We will cover more detail about these trials in the future once the statisticians have analysed all of the data. ■



TRIAL DEER: Some of Invermay's R1 stags in October.

It's complicated...

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

The effects of photoperiod on the rumen of red deer is the broad PhD topic of Lincoln University's Ella Wilson.

There is a limited amount of research about the effects of photoperiod - the length of time exposed to light - on the rumen function of a red deer. There are bites of knowledge such as the secretion of ghrelin by the rumen varies according to the circannual (annual biological processes) rhythm in deer and causes a fluctuation in appetite. However, Wilson is keen to cast the net wider exploring the physiological mechanisms within the rumen that cause change.

“For every result we're finding that there's a number of variables that may have influenced or contributed to what we've observed.”

The project will follow a group of MA red deer hinds over two calendar years during which measurements and observations recorded to get a better understanding of the physiological changes in the rumen. It's not straight forward or easy research due to the interplay of diet and environment as well as physiology, Wilson says.

“For every result we're finding that there's a number of variables that may have influenced or contributed to what we've observed.”

First-stage research is comparing the methane and nitrogen emissions and rumen size of pregnant versus non-pregnant hinds according to diet and environment. Hinds are the main GHG emitters in a commercial deer farm system, so measuring their feed intake, digestion efficiency parameters, microbiome, hormone levels, liveweight as well as methane and nitrogen production could lead to practical management to reduce the GHG emissions of deer, she says. It's on-point research given government policy focus on the methane emissions of ruminant livestock.

More research by Wilson will involve feeding trials with digestion collars to measure the grazing, ruminating and resting habits of deer and analyzing this data to see how it affects nitrogen and methane production and liveweight gain in deer. These results could potentially reduce feed input costs and give farmers better information on what to feed deer to produce more from less.

Wilson was born and raised on a Southland sheep and cropping farm near Winton. Her involvement with deer over this time was minimal although there was occasional fence jumping one from the neighbours that ended up in a crop paddock. Also visits to the farm of school friend Demi Lawrence, daughter of Dave Lawrence and Donna of Tikana Elk, gave her some high level exposure to deer.

On completion of a Lincoln University agricultural science degree Wilson was taken on as an AgResearch Invermay 2020 summer intern for a project looking at how the phytochemistry (or natural compounds) in grazing plants can influence venison production.



HANDS-ON RESEARCH: Ella Wilson saliva sampling Invermay deer earlier this year.

That was her full-on introduction deer which she generally enjoys working with.

“They can be lively, so you definitely have to be aware and engage good handling skills.”

For the project 30 MS yearling red deer were finished on three different pastures: a traditional perennial ryegrass and white clover mix; a regenerative-type mix comprising 23 plant species; and five adjacent monoculture strips (AMS) of ryegrass, lucerne, chicory, plantain and red clover. Over the 12 week project deer liveweights were recorded, and forage and blood samples taken regularly for analysis. Post-slaughter, venison quality/carcass characteristics were measured for each animal. In short the research showed that deer from the AMS pasture achieved greater liveweight gains and produced superior venison. That project was the segway to more deer-related research – an Honours degree project comparing the reliability of blood and saliva testing for measuring nitrate outputs from deer.

“We didn't collect enough data but found there was a strong relationship between the two measurement methods so it's possible we could measure nitrogen excretion using saliva testing which is easier (and less expensive) than blood testing.”

More work is underway to build the data set to develop an easy-to-use nitrogen ‘calculator’, she says.

Wilson says the offering of specialist post-graduate deer courses at Lincoln University and deer content in some of the undergraduate and diploma courses has led to a growing cohort of deer researchers. Meanwhile she will continue her own deer-and-environment trial work and has her sights set on further published research and a professorship. ■

Venison rack with savoury Xmas crackers

Graham Brown, DINZ Executive Chef



Ingredients

For the venison

1 rack of venison

Salt and cracked pepper to season

4
SERVES

For the Xmas cracker

4 sheets of phyllo pastry

100 gms of butter

2 sticks of celery peeled and finely chopped

½ cup hazelnuts chopped or crushed

12 dried apricots finely diced

½ an onion finely diced

¼ cup of instant mashed potato flakes or 1 cup of fresh breadcrumbs¹

egg

½ tsp thyme finely chopped

1 tbspn flat leaf parsley finely chopped

1 tspn Dijon mustard

For the sauce

100 ml meat stock

50 mls of Madeira or tawny port

¼ cup of fresh red currants

1 orange, juice and zest

Red wine vinegar

Salt and pepper

1 tspn of cornflour

Preparation

1. Remove the outer cap muscle from the rack and remove the silver skin with a sharp knife, season with salt and cracked pepper.
2. Clean the cap muscle off then remove all the silver skin and chop coarsely.
3. Place chopped meat in a food processor. Add egg and a little cold stock to make a sausage meat, reserve cold.
4. Finely dice the celery and onion. Sauté in 30 mls of butter, add the crushed hazelnuts and diced apricots. Cook until soft. Add the thyme, parsley, mustard and add the breadcrumbs. Cool then mix in the sausage meat, thoroughly season and form into four cylinders about 100mm long by 25mm thick.
5. Take a sheet of phyllo pastry and brush with melted butter on two-thirds, and fold into three. Brush with butter. Place the sausage on top, roll up and twist the ends like a cracker sealing the joints with butter. Place on a non-stick tray ready to bake.
6. Sear the seasoned rack in a large pan or BBQ hot plate until nicely browned. Cover the bones with tinfoil and roast for 18-20 minutes at 180°C, or internal temperature of 54°C. Rest for 10 minutes in a warm place.
7. Bake the crackers for 10 minutes at 200°C.
8. Add the Madeira to the roasting pan and deglaze the meat brownings, reduce. Add the orange juice and a pinch or two of zest, further reduce. Add a teaspoon of mustard and the stock. Reduce.
9. To thicken add the red currants and check acidity/sweetness adding a little red wine vinegar as required.

To serve

Put the rack back in a hot oven for 3-4 minutes to bring up to temperature and then slice into cutlets. Cut the crackers in half on the bias and arrange on a plate. Pour the sauce around the crackers and serve with a bouquetiere of steamed summer vegetables or a summer salad. ■

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