

Deer Industry News

Beating back the Big Dry

SIGNING OFF

Innes Moffat ponders the past, present and future

EFFICIENCY MEASURES

The drivers of productivity and profit in a venison system

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Deer Industry News

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Cover photo: Red stags enjoying a bale of lucerne hay on Giselle and Marilyn Shewan's Wairau Valley farm, Marlborough. Photo: Trevor Walton.

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Work In Progress

The risk of no frozen velvet sales to China next season is real, and the DINZ board and executive are putting all resources and efforts into resolving the access issue ASAP.



To recap, from 1 May 2024 only dried velvet will be able to be imported to China as a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). DINZ believes these changes are being introduced to better align the import regime for TCMs which is overseen by several Chinese authorities. The changes apply to velvet imported by China from all countries so it's not solely about New Zealand imports.

A positive of the velvet access changes should be a more transparent importation pathway for our velvet which up until now has been problematic. Over the last two years container loads of velvet have been held up at ports due to confusion over paperwork and classifications. The DINZ board believes that the current negotiations with Chinese regulators will help by smoothing that delivery pathway.

DINZ is working with government officials and MPI to establish a new frozen velvet import pathway. One of our most valuable resources in helping resolve our velvet access issue is Felix Shen, the China Coalition market manager based in Shanghai. The coalition was established three years ago with the goal of developing further opportunities for NZ velvet in China. The coalition comprises velvet marketers CK, PGG Wrightson and Provelco. It's supported by DINZ and NZ Trade & Enterprise, and Felix is playing a crucial role in building important relationships.

China's move to dried velvet imports has led NZ stakeholders to ask the question 'why don't we ramp up our velvet drying facilities?' The answer is two-fold. Firstly, it's not easily done and would require a coordinated structure with funding across all parts of the velvet production, selling, processing, exporting and in-market supply chain. The second reason for not overtly building NZ's drying capacity is the competitive advantage of the established and highly efficient velvet drying industry within northern China, which is an important source of capital funding during our five-month velvet selling season. We need to be mindful of respecting this relationship. Our existing drying capacity is limited to about 500 frozen tonnes or about half of our annual production.

In summary, the demand and consumption of velvet in China is growing. New Zealand holds the key to this growth as the largest source of high quality velvet, but the limiting factor is ongoing market access for our frozen product. MPI, with backing from the DINZ board is working hard to negotiate access under new protocols. In the meantime, our advice to growers is to keep in contact with your velvet company, DFA branch, and DINZ as we work together towards a prompt but positive outcome for the next velvet selling season.

Finally, a special mention to Innes Moffat, who is stepping aside after 18 years with DINZ. The past four years as chief executive have been intensely challenging but Innes has remained positive and fully supportive of the board. All the very best for the next stage in your career and a huge thanks for your dedication and input into our industry. ■

Tony Cochrane

Velvet industry appointed DINZ board member.
PGG Wrightson national deer and velvet manager.

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Star-studded attention

Deer in one form or another is attracting A-lister movie star attention. Cillian Murphy, best known for his starring roles in ‘Oppenheimer’ and ‘Peaky Blinders’ revealed to a talk show host that he ditched 12 years of vegan living after savouring venison. He got a ribbing from the interviewer for eating “Bambi”, but Murphy said he felt “amazing afterwards.....it tasted so good.” See for yourself: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UFZX2t4drzg>

Meanwhile Yellowstone’s loyal and rugged ranch hand Rip Wheeler (Cole Hauser) is heading to 2023 Deer Industry Environmental Award winning Glen Dene Station for some trophy hunting and timeout from sugar and spice onscreen wife Beth.



On board

Congratulations to Blackmount deer farmer Richard Greer, a new supplier representative elected to the Alliance board. There will be plenty for directors to talk about around the board table given the 2023 financial year in which the southern co-operative recorded a \$97.9 million loss and reduced revenue of \$2 billion. Greer says he’ll be the only director with deer farming experience. “It will be good to have some deer representation, we’re a niche industry and have a unique place in the red meat sector.”



Greer, along with wife Kylie run about 3000 deer along with sheep and cattle on 1600ha at Sunnyside Station, Monowai. He’s an inaugural member of the Southland Advance Party and credits the group for giving him the confidence to move from deer breeding and store weaner production to deer breeding and weaner finishing.

Sustainability sells

That’s the conclusion of a tracking study of US consumer trends in the consumer-packaged goods sector. The McKinsey study covered five years of US sales data to June 2022 and showed that products with environmental social and governance (ESG) claims, using terms such as “cage-free” and “eco-friendly” experienced average cumulative growth of 28 percent, outperforming products without such claims, which achieved 20 percent growth.

“For New Zealand farmers, this shows real potential for increased market share and profitability through the use of sustainable production credentials for our red meat products,” Beef + Lamb NZ’s Hugh Good says. “It underlines the importance of programmes like the New Zealand Farm Assurance Programme (NZFAP) and New Zealand Farm Assurance Programme Plus (NZFAP Plus), which will

allow us to produce to a higher sustainability standard and allow us to capture value in the market.”

Deer cheer

Elk & Wapiti Society president Grant Hasse taste-tests a Kahlua and deers’ milk shot prior to serving at the society’s annual competition dinner (see page 6.) The creamy and smooth-as-tipple was made from deers’ milk supplied by Pete and Sharon McIntyre.



United

The creation of the Aotearoa New Zealand Catchment Communities group will build on progress made by the many catchment groups across the country, by assisting central government in making practical and pragmatic decisions. Multiple catchment groups have established in recent years and ANZCC aims to represent these groups, develop channels for sharing resources, identify opportunities for research, and have input into government policy.

Open Day at Fairlight

The Fairlight Foundation is holding an Open Day at Fairlight Station on Saturday 24 June. Fairlight Station runs deer, cattle and sheep on 3800ha in



Northern Southland. Owners Doug and Mari Harpur along with long-time station managers Simon and Lou Wright established in 2020 the Fairlight Foundation, with the purpose of advancing women in agriculture. The foundation’s cornerstone programme is a year-long internship which immerses and upskills women tertiary graduates in practical farming. The Open Day will provide information on all aspects of the internship and the skills and attributes internees develop over the year. Find out more and register at: laura.koot@thefairlightfoundation.org by Fri 9th June.

Checking-in

New events to support North Island rural communities impacted by last year’s adverse weather events have been announced by ‘Checking-in’, a collaboration of the



AgriWomen’s Development Trust, Rural Women New Zealand and Farmstrong, supported by the Rural Support Trust. The events range from lighthearted comedy, wellbeing and resilience programmes to the celebration of women who have made an impact in weather-affected communities. Rural people across the country are also invited to subscribe to the ‘Checking-in’ tools & tips email series. For information on upcoming events go to checking-in.co.nz ■

Venison vendor

The Merchant of Venison, owned and operated by James and Angela Petrie, is a farmed venison wholesaler to butchers, retailers, restaurants and hospitality businesses and also runs an online store. The specialist business started as an after-hours gig 25 years ago while James was working in the boning room of Mountain River processors. Demand grew and in 2010, he took the leap and made it a full-time business with the backing of his wife Angela. Nowadays the Merchant of Venison delivers a range of venison cuts throughout the South Island.

You and Angela have grown a full-time business on the back of NZ farmed venison. What are your respective roles in the business?

I do everything from getting the orders to delivering them and everything in between such as collecting blood which is an ingredient in the 2017 Sausage of the Year winner (a Boudin Noir) made by a local butcher, cooking the ribs, and dicing venison for our wholesaled products. Angela tries to keep me on the straight and narrow as well as keeping the business on target and moving forward. She has a firm handle on all the financial, administration and computer work-related tasks. We have another team member Chris Miller, helping out with deliveries. He sold his butcher shop last year and now enjoys seeing the butchery trade from a different perspective as he travels around delivering orders.

Who are the key people who have helped you in growing the business, and in what way have they helped?

Ian Stewart, the former manager of Mountain River, who sold me the first lot of venison neck bones to get me started; John Sadler for putting up with my many questions; DINZ executive chef Graham Brown (Brownie), his knowledge of venison is unbelievable! Having top chefs coming up to me and saying he is their idol is pretty special. I'm also grateful to all the farmers and chefs who have shared their knowledge and experiences about farming deer and producing top venison. It's difficult to put a price on how important this input is in helping to promote the amazing product that we as an industry produce.

Is venison still a 'hard-to-sell' product, or are chefs and people in the hospitality business becoming more familiar with it?

Yes and no. New Zealand farmed venison is unique and has in some ways suffered from preconceived ideas. It's such a versatile meat that can be cut, prepared, cooked, and served in so many ways. I like to debunk myths about the meat, such as needing to add fat to venison burgers, it's simply not true and the proof is Joe's Garage cafes who use farmed venison mince for their venison burger which is very popular.

What in your opinion would help to further increase the sales of NZ farm-raised venison?

As an industry we need to constantly promote the 'farmed venison experience' and how it differs from other red meat, and the various cuts on offer. A classic is venison brisket. Beef brisket is the up-

and-coming cut at the moment, but Graham Brown does venison brisket which is spectacular and without the fat of beef. Also, we need to constantly tell people about our 50 year history - what we've achieved in such a short time and how there is nothing like New Zealand farm-raised venison.

What's your favourite Merchant of Venison product and why?

That's a bit like asking me 'who is your favourite child'! Venison rumps never disappoint and are my go to favourite and recommendation for any restaurant client because they cook so well. I also like venison mince because it's the best meat mince.

What was a 2023 business highlight?

The Bidfood trade shows and Fine Foods 2023 in Auckland with Graham Brown. Brownie is a legend and is the best promoter of New Zealand farmed venison in the world!

Fine Foods is a three day biannual hospitality-only trade show held at the Ellerslie Event Centre. We had only seven weeks to get ready and didn't really know what we were in for but thanks to a huge team effort from Angela and our daughter Bridgette, Brownie, Fred from Akaroa Butchery, along with help from John and Bruce from Mountain River and DINZ we did the impossible. It was a great opportunity and one we would love to do again - with a bit more time to plan (sorry Angela)! ■



Bigger & better

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor



This year's Elk & Wapiti Society annual competition was a multi-level celebration.

As well as acknowledging the best elk/wapiti velvet and antler, key people who had made a positive contribution to the deer industry were singled out at the Cromwell gathering.

Tom May (Mayfield Elk) earned EWSNZ life membership for his long-time support of the society and was presented by Tony Pearse a striking blue sash and special LED-lit trophy. May, an inaugural EWSNZ member has served as president and was a major supporter and contributor to society field days, velvet pools, competitions, auctions and breed research. He was happy to share his knowledge and expertise and had been a "helping hand" to many, EWSNZ president Grant Hasse said.



LONGHAUL CHAMP New EWSNZ life member Tom May.

Purple rosettes – the badge of honour for outstanding industry contributors – went to PGG Wrightson's deer specialist Ron Schroeder (also the 2022 Deer Industry Award winner), PGG Wrightson deer genetics manager Graham Kinsman (see page 30) and DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat.

"It was great to acknowledge Innes because a lot of what the society has achieved in recent years is due to his willingness to listen and work with us," Hasse said.

The velvet and antler competition attracted 50 entries from 11 farms, up from previous years, and the crowd of about 45 included "new faces", he said.

"There are new members that are bringing with them new ideas and change so we certainly aren't stagnating." ■



VELVET TOUCH: CK velvet buyer Tony Pidgeon.



ITS COMPLICATED: John Sadler gave a brief history and overview of the niche elk meat market.

EWSNZ 2024 velvet competition results

Place	Bull	Owner	Weight (kg)	NZCWI
Open Supreme				
1	Eureka	Mayfield Elk	24.16	192.28
2	Tombstone	Clachanburn Elk	21.25	185.2
Two-year-old				
1	Mighty	Tikana	10.64	123.91
2	Omen	Tikana	9.42	121.04
3	Bonanza	Mayfield Elk	11.12	116.78
Three-year-old				
1	Patriarch	Tikana	14.05	137.7
2	Gold Tooth	Tikana	16.11	133.06
3	Pnk3093	Mayfield Elk	14.63	132.51

There's further opportunity for the elk meat market, Mountain River's John Sadler said. The challenge from a marketing perspective was to add value and find markets for the whole carcass.

"You can't make elk a premium-returning product just by selling a few loins or a bit of trim at a high price, you have to sell as much of each animal as possible," he said.

Mountain River had developed the market for elk meat since the early 2000s and now had chilled leg cuts year-round in a Swiss supermarket chain, and in the United States loin cuts retailing on the east coast for \$NZ104/kg, and ground meat (mince) for \$55/kg.

"It's not a cheap meat; it's a special and occasional purchase category... we don't supply a lot, so we have to be careful that we don't flood the market."

Mountain River was focused on increasing the number of elk suppliers and this year's contracts had been well supported, he said.

At conclusion of his talk the FAQ of what from a marketing perspective defined elk elicited no definitive answer. The definition varied among processors and according to the legal truth and labelling requirements of specific markets, DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat said. He reiterated the importance of valuing the elk opportunity and supporting its development to meet customers' needs.



HELPING HANDS: Callum McLean (left) and Hamish Bartholomew were on hand to set up the velvet display.

Incredible job vacancies

Peel Forest Estate recently supported two of its long-standing team members into new challenges outside of the deer sector. Highly grateful for the contribution that these two individuals made over the past six years, Peel Forest Estate presents two opportunities to join their team at a senior level.



Peel Forest Estate encompasses 2,800ha running 24,000 stock units in the foothills of Mt Peel, South Canterbury. Recognised both globally and domestically for its red deer genetics, Peel Forest Estate produces Velvet, Venison and Trophy stags, as well as a large-scale commercial operation, leading the market in its innovation and advancement.

General Manager

Reporting to the CEO, the General Manager has a focus on efficient and sustainable practices and ensures operations are planned, tracked, and reviewed with sustainable profit in mind. This role requires a deep knowledge of farming systems, strong leadership and the ability to deliver on culture KPI's. Deer experience is preferable but not essential.

Head Stockman and Velvet Coordinator

Working closely with the Stock Manager, the key responsibilities include managing Peel Forests commercial velvet operation, including the direct oversight of its main shed and the velvetting of 4,000 stags annually. Expertise is required in velvet grading, stock feeding, pasture management and leading a team of shepherds.

Peel Forest boasts world-class outdoor activities including hunting, fishing, hiking, jetboating with a thriving local community.



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The sky's the limit

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

There is opportunity to take Cervelt to the next level, co-developer of the unique deer down luxury fibre and textile yarn Richard Keddell says.



SUPERFINE: Richard Keddell (right) and Bert McGhee with deer-down used in the manufacture of Cervelt, a consistently superfine 13 micron fibre.

“Our problem is that we’re a small company supplying a small number of clients, but we have the special technology producing a unique yarn and I think that with the right marketing connections we can go further.”

Twenty years ago Keddell, a Tauranga orthopedic surgeon, and engineer/textile expert Bert McGhee developed the process to extract the downy hair fibre from deer slipe for spinning into yarn for knitwear and textiles. The fibre comes from slipe collected from mid-May until early-October; it’s the time from the longest to the shortest day when deer grow their winter coat. The slipe is sourced throughout the country and interestingly there’s very little variation in the yield and quality of Cervelt by region. Every 40 tonnes of slipe yields one to two tonnes of Cervelt.

“The people who buy Cervelt want a one-of-a-kind garment without the stand-out branding. What’s important to them is that they know they’re the only one in the room wearing that particular garment.”

When the business started out in 2004 about four tonnes of fibre was processed a year; now, due to the retrenchment in deer numbers, that’s reduced to about one tonne a year. However, there’s plenty in stock and supply is not a problem for the meantime. But Keddell is looking ahead for a new method to collect fibre as the leather industry moves away from slipe production. It’s a challenge but he hopes that new technology will make the process easier and produce less waste product. The “waste” is the bulkier coarse fibre, some of which is used by Japanese manufacturers to make mats and protective garments for the martial arts. Trials are underway to see if this fibre can also be used in a natural insulation product.

Once extracted the Cervelt fibre is outsourced for spinning in Lower Hutt or Italy. Cervelt fabric is produced in Italy, and knitwear by a Tauranga firm.

Keddell’s relationship with the fashion industry through Cervelt is “interesting”. There’s pushback from some fashionwear brands about the use of animal fibre such as Cervelt due to the misconception that deer are slaughtered to extract the fibre.

“We have spent a lot of time explaining that this is not the case.”

Cervelt is a consistently superfine 13 micron fibre and arguably the world’s most scarce and exclusive luxury fibre. That claim is possibly not far off the truth given that swanky US sock brand William Abraham is selling limited edition Cervelt socks for \$US1275 (approx. \$NZ2,100). The yarn is used in other exclusive international fashionwear knitwear and clothing brands including Armani, Louis Vuitton and Hermes.

“The people who buy Cervelt want a one-of-a-kind garment without the stand-out branding. What’s important to them is that they know they’re the only one in the room wearing that particular garment,” Keddell says.

Cervelt is used locally in Kapeka luxury knitwear sold by tourist-focused retailer Aotea where a classic scarf sells for \$1650 and a classic V Neck sweater for \$3000.

The exorbitant price tag garments do not parallel the returns made by Keddell. The Cervelt fibre sells for \$1450/kg, but development of the business has “cost a fortune”, but through it he’s become rich in contacts and experiences. Some of the out-of-the-normal happenings include hosting the brothers of the luxury fashion brand Hermes for Christmas lunch, and the gifting of a virgin-red scarf to Virgin Group founder Sir Richard Branson. There’s also the email from Moroccan sports entrepreneur and billionaire Patrick Guerrand-Hermes declaring his Cervelt jumper to be the warmest, lightest sweater ever owned.

Cervelt, like deer milk cheese, is another example of a unique and novel NZ farmed deer-derived product. Find out more at cervelt.com.

Picture perfect



Once again, MSD Animal Health and Allflex are sponsoring the Deer Industry Photo Competition. Last year’s competition saw some spectacular entries making the judging job a very difficult one. As usual there are some great prizes on offer, including:

- \$500 cash prize for the first-place winner
- Category winner cash prizes
- Premium gift pack for "People's Choice" award
- Framed photos of winning photographs

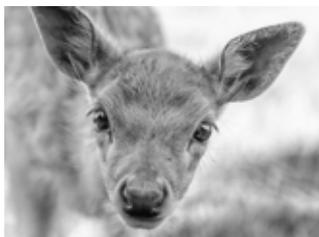
There’s also a new elk/wapiti category sponsored by the Elk & Wapiti Society. Photos must be of pheno-typical elk/wapiti, see the

T&Cs on the entry form to find out more. As a special first year offer the entry fee will be waived on all photos in this category. In all other categories the entry fee is \$5 per photo, and there's no limit on the number of entries.

For more information and an entry form, visit deernz.org/msd-allflex-photo-comp

NOTE: Professional photographers, who derive income from photography are not eligible to enter

Competition closes 5pm, Friday 12 April 2024.



CURIOS: Last year's competition winner by Gill Maclean

The wrap on RAP

The newly appointed Research Advisory Panel will play an important role in aligning DINZ science with strategy. It's a six member group whose role is to recommend research priorities to the Research Committee, propose an annual research plan, monitor ongoing research projects, and evaluate completed research projects. The RAP members have been chosen by DFA and DINZ to ensure a mix of industry knowledge and perspectives. They include Hawke's Bay deer farmer and vet Richard Hilson; Danette McKeown, a deer farmer with a background in environmental science; Alastair Nicol, a retired academic with a long history in deer research; Sharon McIntyre, geneticist, Deer Select manager and deer/ dairy deer farmer and AgResearch's Megan Skiffington, recognising the importance of working closely with the CRI. The group is supported by DINZ's Emil Murphy and Amy Wills.

The inaugural meeting of the RAP in late February aired history, affirmed purpose and created the foundation for an even more positive future for deer industry research, DINZ board member and Research Committee chair Jacqueline Rowarth says.

"When I look at the panel, I see a breadth of expertise and experience. That is critical as we work together to identify and evaluate research that provides the greatest impact for the industry, and for New Zealand."

Megan Skiffington, AgResearch

"'Even more' because the link between deer farmers and deer scientists has always been strong. In fact, it has been described by external research managers as the model for innovation, technology and practice change, and adoption."

A sceptic might question why a RAP is needed but AgResearch's Megan Skiffington has a clear view on its value: "The challenges for the deer industry are growing and evolving, and it's really important the research stays tightly connected with those challenges," she says.

"When I look at the panel, I see a breadth of expertise and experience. That is critical as we work together to identify and evaluate research that provides the greatest impact for the industry, and for New Zealand."

The need to align DINZ science with strategy was explained by Rowarth in a *Deer Industry News* editorial (December 2023). The alignment started with an independent science review last year and a new process and pathway for identifying and prioritising science projects and research under the six strategy focus areas of animal health, climate change mitigation, optimising value from deer, market research, animal welfare and the environment. A Research Committee, a sub-committee of the board, was formed to oversee all the industry's research investments. The committee is chaired by Rowarth, and the members are Dave Courtney, Tony Cochrane, and Gerard Hickey. The committee is responsible for setting the research strategy, the priority areas for research, and approving and monitoring each year's research plan.

DINZ executive chair Mandy Bell, is pleased with the alignment of research expenditure with the strategy approved by the board.

"We've set the goal of adding value for the industry, with specific areas of activity. Now we can see where our funds are creating greatest impact. Knowledge will create an even better future, which is what we all want." ■

Do you have a business issue that you believe needs further industry science and research investment? Get in touch by emailing research@deernz.org with the information or contact your local DFA representative.

For more information on science and research programmes, past and present, please visit the DINZ website at deernz.org/home/deer-industry-new-zealand/research

Letters to the Editor

Dear NZ deer farm supporters,

On behalf of the Kaipara deer farmers who received your generous financial assistance, we want to express our deepest gratitude for the invaluable timely support.

In times of hardship, the spirit of solidarity within the farming community is apparent. The willingness to extend a helping hand to fellow farmers facing difficulties touched our hearts. Your support not only eased our financial burdens but also reaffirmed the strong bonds and sense of community that define deer farmers nationwide.

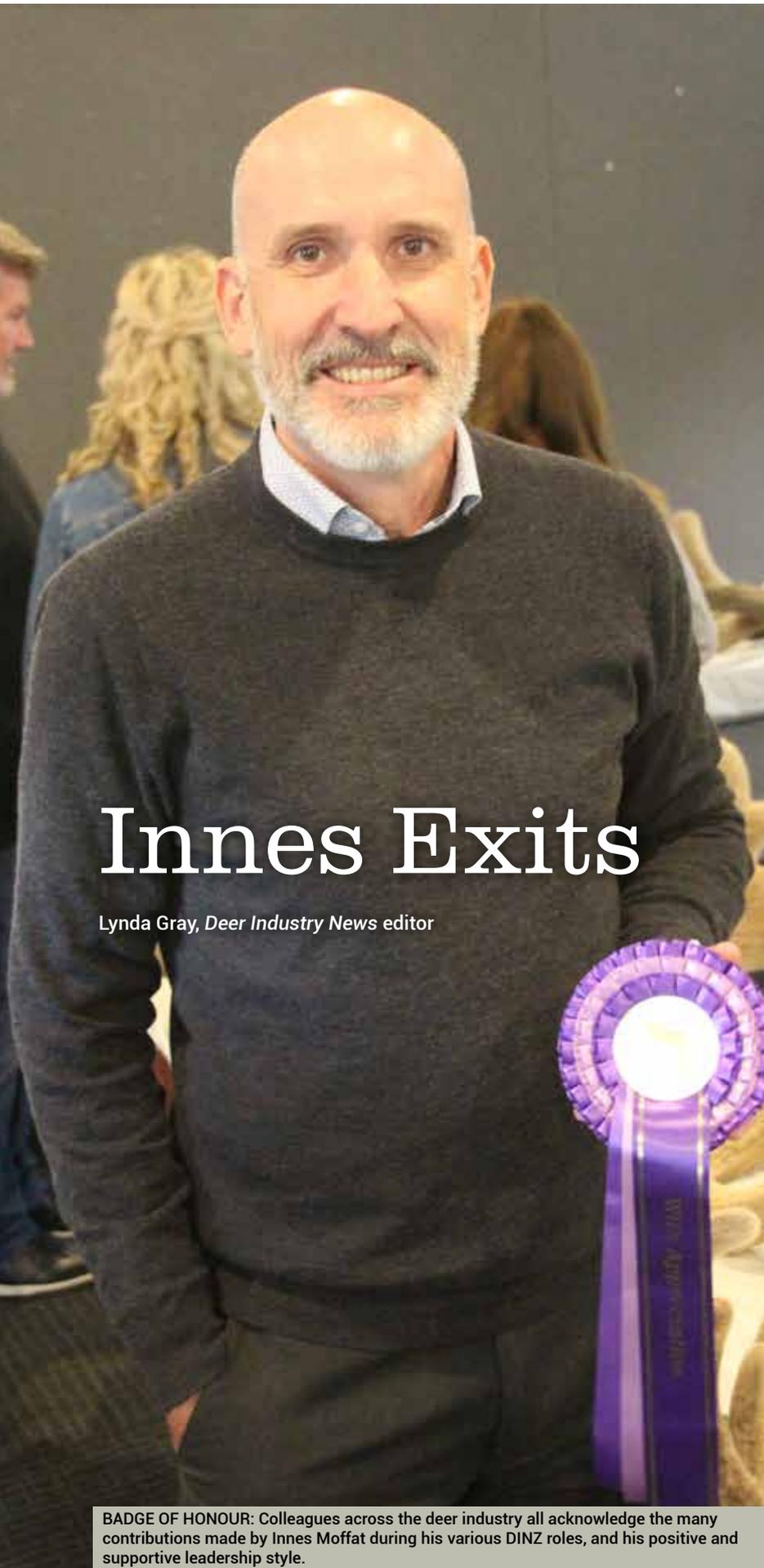
The assistance came at a crucial moment. It is a testament to the compassion of those who donated items to be auctioned and those that brought them; they are the people who understand the importance of standing together in both good times and bad. Knowing we had this support was invaluable.

Again, thank you for the financial and moral support, your actions are a perfect example of the strength of our farming community. We look forward to the opportunity to pay it forward and support others in need when the time comes.

Wishing you all the best and may your "fields be abundant and your harvests bountiful".

With heartfelt appreciation,

Ian Bristow (chairman), Dave Chisholm (secretary)
Kaipara Branch, NZDFA



Innes Exits

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

BADGE OF HONOUR: Colleagues across the deer industry all acknowledge the many contributions made by Innes Moffat during his various DINZ roles, and his positive and supportive leadership style.



After 18 years at DINZ, the last four in the chief executive hot seat, Innes Moffat is bowing out. In a career recap chat with *Deer Industry News* he ponders the past, present and future, and the benefits of SCUBA diving.

Helping secure \$7 million of Primary Growth Profit funding for the Passion to Profit (P2P) strategy and driving establishment of Advance Parties are DINZ career highlights for Innes Moffat. Pulling the bid together based on foundation work by previous chief executives, Mark O'Connor and Dan Coup was a big project. P2P was a cornerstone \$15 million 50:50 government and industry funded seven year (2015 – 2022) project with the big picture goal of increasing industry revenue. Although it had fallen short of this goal, P2P achieved the secondary goals of positively changing the way deer were farmed and venison marketed, the benefits of which are now becoming evident. Advance Parties were an important forum for talking and walking improved deer management and Moffat drove the establishment of these during his role as P2P manager.

“I really enjoyed helping set up the Advance Parties and getting out to work with the various groups of farmers.”

Some farmers were skeptical about the value of the initiative, but the 29 groups and 330 farmers involved at conclusion of the project suggest that DINZ and Moffat got the pitch right.

Further vindication of the value that Advance Parties and supporting DINZ initiatives

delivered is the improvement in two key production indicators. Reproduction performance (hinds mated to live fawns 1 June) steadily improved from 75 to 83%, and the carcass weight average had increased 4-55kg to 58.5 – 59kg.

“That’s influenced by the higher proportion of stags, but the point is, increased growth rates mean that more deer are being killed earlier – 12-months as opposed to 18-months – at heavier weights and that to me shows farmers are using genetics and feeding to their advantage.”

Moffat joined DINZ in 2005 taking on the role of venison marketing services manager. The industry was roughly twice the size of today: 4000 farmers and 1.6 million deer generating export earnings of about \$300 million, 79% (32,000 tonnes) was from venison, and 10% (490 tonnes) velvet, with the remainder co-products. Industry leaders were dealing with the hangover of rapid expansion due to the heavy investment by corporates over the late 1990s – an oversupply of venison for a limited European market. The supply and demand imbalance pulled down the schedule price briefly to an all-time low of around \$4/kg. At the same time deer were being pushed out from their traditional finishing country as the dairying boom took hold across Southland and Canterbury, causing some farmers to walk away from deer.

Innes Moffat excels at bone-dry humour, his dead-pan delivery of one-liners sometimes leaving the recipient unsure if he was “taking the mickey” or serious. There are numerous examples such as the mysteriously appearing screen saver on Rhys Griffiths’ computer, ‘Innes is my hero.’

It was grim but as recent history shows the industry pushed back albeit in a reduced format. Nowadays the industry comprises approximately 1200 paid-up DFA members and 800,000 deer generating around \$340 million in export earnings comprising 60% venison (17,000 tonnes) and 40% velvet (1100 tonnes).

But Moffat says the venison industry is now on a more even price keel.

“In the five years leading up to Covid, venison prices were more stable in comparison to beef, lamb and dairy and now we’re seeing that continued stability due to market diversification, value-adding, branding and reduced reliance on the German game and commodity market.”

But land use change is again impacting the industry but this time it’s carbon forestry rather than dairying.

“Trees and environmental constraints have affected the willingness of farmers to invest in new infrastructure or retain deer numbers in some regions,” he says.

That has brought with it a change to the scale and focus of deer farms. There’s been the exit of smaller-scale farmers, the consolidation and/or expansion of larger farms and more of a focus on velvet production and trophy breeding. This change in



DAB HAND: Innes Moffat, pictured with professional caterer Ruth Pretty, was happy to swap office attire for apron and tongs to help out DINZ executive chef Graham Brown at cooking demonstrations.

industry metrics is a natural evolution, Moffat says, which will continue to unfold in line with national regulation, policy and market demands. He’s quietly confident that in 10 years there will be a three-way income earning split of high quality niche venison products, high quality velvet for TCM and healthy/functional food products, and trophy tourism. He adds that there is still untapped potential to extract more value from co-products through the development of micronutrients and Asian edibles.

Master Chef?

Perhaps not, but Moffat became a reasonable “dab hand” during his stint as venison marketing services manager when he was an occasional assistant to DINZ executive chef Graham Brown

“I had to blood him to all things venison and got him into an apron on quite few occasions. He won’t tell anyone this, but his culinary prowess is all down to me,” Brown says.

“We haven’t always agreed on all things, but you can have a good robust chat with Innes and a cold beer afterwards.”

Graham mentions Moffat’s many defining attributes, including an analytical mind and loyalty to his people.

Leadership

Several colleagues mention Moffat's people skills.

"What has always impressed me has been his acute awareness of, and sensitivity to, what's going on around him - whether it be in world markets, the wider industry, or within the work environment. He's not only been strongly perceptive, but is also highly empathetic, an important quality in a colleague and leader, former *Deer Industry News* editor Phil Stewart says. Tony Pearce agrees.

"Innes was one who never sought the public limelight but who certainly enjoyed the interaction with deer farmers, DFA events and getting out and about to on farm events. He is a considerate and supportive colleague who has interacted well with people across the industry."

Moffat says he's always tried to be thoughtful in providing support to DINZ people to help them achieve goals.

"I'm not an evangelistic or charismatic leader. For me leadership is about setting clear expectations about what DINZ is here for, and for the DINZ team and then supporting them so they can achieve those outcomes."

Having an open mind and seeing an issue from different viewpoints is another quality he's applied well in his leadership roles. That ability to look at issues from different angles is comparable in certain respects to SCUBA diving, a favourite after-hours pursuit. He's dived off the coast of Wellington for several years lured initially by the prospect of catching crayfish but what he came to enjoy more was the underwater perspective.

"From land you see the surface of the sea but going under water gives you a completely different view of things."

That openness to view and consider issues from varying perspectives and ask questions have generally been helpful in his leadership role.

"It hasn't always helped with clarity and arriving at a single focus but there is seldom a single answer."

He gives as an example the 'social license to operate' construct, the public's perception of the acceptability of a company, organisation or sector's activities. The public all has differing views on how the farming industry should operate, Moffat says, and it's important to take on board those opinions.

"The vast majority of people perceive deer farming and what we produce in a positive light but it's important that we don't give them a reason for us to become a target."

The future

The New Zealand deer industry should be proud of the nutritious and safe venison and unique quality velvet produced and underpinned by excellent QA systems and codes of practice. But he warns that the requirements and expectations of customers will not diminish and meeting them will not always mean a price premium.

"But we will have to satisfy them to get access to these markets...it will be an ongoing journey."

The hour of reflection with *Deer Industry News*' covered-off a range of deer-related topics as well as his interests and education,



MEAT & GREET: Innes Moffat (right) enjoyed getting out and about to meet with people across the industry.

including an Honours degree in history and politics. An arts-based degree might not seem the ideal prerequisite for a primary producer organisation leader, but then again it depends on what angle you view things from.

“History isn’t about looking backwards, it’s about understanding how we got to where we are and how that might help to navigate the way forward,” Moffat says.

After 18 years of immersion in all aspects of the deer industry he’s gained a deep dive appreciation of what’s shaped and defined it.

“The vast majority of people perceive deer farming and what we produce in a positive light but it’s important that we don’t give them a reason for us to become a target.”

Innes Moffat

“I look back on 50 years of deer farming and my own involvement and what stands out for me is how the industry has always questioned ‘can we do things better?’. People across the industry have always been willing to share information and that’s been a key driver of our rapid development.”

That willingness to collaborate and share will undoubtedly be important in moving the industry forward, he adds.

In a Business Desk interview last year Moffat said he was still unsure “of what he wanted to be when he grew up”. When pushed he admits that he has probably reached full maturity and has come to the realization that he enjoys the primary sector and the challenges of international trade. Immediate life beyond DINZ will be time-out for rest, relaxation and reflection on possible primary industry contract opportunities that will deliver job satisfaction and challenge.

Deer Industry News along with everyone in the New Zealand farmed deer fraternity sincerely thanks Innes for his far-reaching and valuable contributions and wishes him well for the future. ■



HAIR TODAY, GONE TOMORROW: For former Deer Industry News editor Phil Stewart which photo to use of Innes alongside articles – clean-shaven or bearded – was always a hit- and-miss guess. “We always kept both versions on hand, but inevitably he’d catch us out. He never seemed to mind if we got it wrong.”



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New NZ venison brand ambassador in China: Xijin Wu

Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Influential Chinese chef Xijin Wu, culinary director for a number of restaurants in Shanghai including Pinyeuting ('Tasting Room'), has been selected as New Zealand venison's new brand ambassador in China – all part of the continuing plan to build the Chinese market for New Zealand venison.

"While the market is very mature for velvet, it's in a relatively naïve stage for venison and it's early days in the programme," explains DINZ assistant markets manager Virginia Connell.

As an influential New Zealand venison brand ambassador, like DINZ contract chef Shannon Campbell in Europe, non-English-speaking Chef Wu will help to increase awareness of, and demand for, New Zealand venison through his networks in China.

Wu was part of the recent 'Ends of the Earth' culinary adventure in New Zealand for six influential Chinese chefs and influencers, featuring six top New Zealand products, over six whistlestop days in late November. Six is considered a lucky number in Chinese mythology.

During the trip, organised by Tribal Brand Asia (TBA), which works with DINZ and other New Zealand organisations in China, Chef Wu demonstrated his appreciation and passion for the New Zealand deer industry's products, Connell says.

The accomplished and influential chef grew up in the Sichuan region of China, one of the country's two regional cuisines early research found to be best suited to New Zealand venison. Sichuan is renowned for its cuisine and is where Wu developed a deep appreciation for its dishes. Starting his career at 17, he worked his way up through prestigious hotel and restaurant kitchens, including 'Shanghai XioNanGuo'. Today, he is very active on Chinese social media platforms WeChat and the Chinese version of TikTok, Douyin.

The 'Ends of the Earth' initiative (see DINZ eNews, December 2023) was, "a great result and start for New Zealand farm-raised

venison, particularly, and will stand New Zealand in good stead for the future," Connell says, who organised the day focused on venison at the start of the tour on 21 November.

It has created a strong connection with and between the chefs themselves, she notes.

Coverage from the event is still being analysed,. Wu's reports of his deer industry experience achieved more than 6,000 views from the first day alone.

New Zealand venison's social media channels and other marketing platforms, globally as well as in China, will be featuring photographs and video footage in the bank of material stocked up by the TBA, "at least for the next year," she says. A snapshot of footage from the day can be viewed in TBA's video at <https://bit.ly/3T4REZR>.

Putting on the Ritz in March

DINZ executive chair Mandy Bell, DINZ markets manager Rhys Griffiths and Connell will catch up with the chefs again during their visit to the market in March.

New Zealand venison is relatively unknown to the Chinese population, "the challenge and opportunity" for New Zealand venison will always be "getting more people interested in the product."

Hunter McGregor

A highlight of the visit will be a distinctively New Zealand deer industry event for around 25 important trade contacts, customers, and media at one of Shanghai's top hotels, the Ritz-Carlton Pudong. Wu will be working alongside Graham Brown and the hotel's executive chef to create an "unforgettable menu, showcasing the best New Zealand deer products," Connell says.

This will be Bell's first official visit to China as DINZ executive chair. The DINZ team will also meet with importers and government officials in Beijing, spend some time with TBA personnel, and some key influencers, including other high-profile chefs, before moving on to Korea.

Other planned promotional activities this year will feature new cuts or value-added products, tell the deer industry's



READY TO GO: Sliced New Zealand venison for Chinese dishes.

sustainability story, along with alternative uses for deer velvet in culinary applications, Connell says.

There is both challenge and opportunity in China

Being relatively unknown to the Chinese population, “the challenge and opportunity” for New Zealand venison will always be “getting more people interested in the product,” Hunter McGregor of Rata Foods says.

He is one of the venison marketers keeping a keen eye on what was happening around this year’s week-long Lunar New Year holiday, which started on 10 February, heralding the powerful Year of the Dragon.

Commentators, including McGregor, are expecting the Chinese economy to slow this year.

Chinese consumer confidence, “will be worse this year than last,” he notes. There are two main drivers for what he describes as the market “reset”: the fall in the housing market and job security.

“People are still spending, but spending less.”

Over the next 10 years, however, the China Ministry for Agricultural and Rural Affairs (MARA) expects continued demand for protein, an average GDP growth of 4.9 percent to be maintained through to 2032 and population decline to 1.4 billion. These figures were contained in the Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFAT)’s latest market report – ‘China: Agricultural Outlook 2023-2032’.

Although the country is becoming more self-sufficient in pork and



OFALLY GOOD: Hunter McGregor holding the appetiser for a venison event last year, deer heart skewer with a shot of whiskey sour. It was a “good start to kick off the event,” he says.

poultry, MARA’s projections show continuing demand for beef and sheepmeat, imports of which are anticipated to grow by 17.2 percent by 33.3 percent respectively by 2032.

While competition for those proteins will be tough from other importing countries in coming years, New Zealand farm-raised venison will be finding its own niches in the massive market that McGregor says has places for processing-type cuts right through to fine-dining. ■



WALKING THE TALK: DINZ executive chair Mandy Bell talks to Xijin Wi at Criffel Station.



CLOSE UP: Chef Wu (centre) gains an appreciation of Fairlight Station velvet from station manager Simon Wright (right) and Virginia Connell.



FLYING HIGH: The group caught a ride by helicopter to “Harry’s Hut” at the top of Criffel Station to get an appreciation of their surroundings.



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

Opportunity knocks

Here's your chance to shape the NZDFA's future by stepping up for a leadership position. The association needs leaders to maintain an effective voice for farmers at the industry level, pan-agricultural sector level and with regional and central government so we encourage you to think about any of these positions.

Nominations are open for four NZDFA appointed representative positions: two NZDFA Selection and Appointments Panel (SAP) members and two NZDFA Executive Committee (EC) members.

The following members are up for re-election:

- Graham Peck (SAP, elected 2022)
- William Oliver (SAP, elected 2022)
- Karen Middelberg (EC, elected 2022)
- Jamie Ward (EC, appointed 2022)

There is also one producer-appointed position to the DINZ board due to the retirement by rotation of Mandy Bell.

Nominees will have an opportunity to address the NZDFA AGM in May and will be interviewed in June by the NZDFA SAP to decide on the best candidate.

For more information on these positions, and nomination forms, visit: www.deernz.org/industry-positions. You can get a first-hand account of what the positions involve by talking to an incumbent EC or SAP member. Visit deernz.org/nzdfa/contact-us or email nzdfa@deernz.org for contact details. Alternatively, call Lindsay Fung to talk in confidence, or register your interest, email: lindsay.fung@deernz.org or phone: 027 668 0141.

Nominations close 4pm Friday, 22 March 2024.



NZDFA 2023-24 executive committee, L-R: Karen Middelberg, Mark McCoard, Justin Stevens (chair), Jamie Ward.

Fresh look needed

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Mark McCoard wants to keep the conversation going about the issues and opportunities for over-85kg carcasses mostly from mature velvet stags.

“It’s a problem that’s not going away and what we’re trying to do is keep the conversation going about how we might address it,” he says.

Industry statistics show that the annual kill of mature stags jumped from about 18,000 in 2021 to 37,000 (2022) and 34,000-plus (2023). There is a second cohort contributing to the problem - young stags who due to the combination of venison growth genetics and management are killing out at over 85kgCW. The financial penalty for farmers exceeding this 85kg carcass ceiling has been considerable, McCoard says, although some venison companies have sidelined this threshold.

“But farmers need a real income boost with on farm costs skyrocketing in the past three years,” he says.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: These venison sliders by chef Tyson Burrows (right) are an example of new taste opportunities for older and heavy-weight carcass stags.

But rather than dwell on the problem McCoard and fellow members of the Taihape-Ruapehu DFA branch have highlighted the menu opportunities of this growing venison category. At the February dinner following the Central Regions and Taihape-Ruapehu DFA velvet competition, guests got to taste-test four venison dishes from six-year-old stag. Each was prepared by Tyson Burrows, co-owner of paddock-to-plate restaurant Rustic Eating House and 2019 winner of 'My Restaurant Rules.' The first dish, a slow cooked venison shank was "melt in your mouth" and the venison sliders and corned venison served in a Reuben-style sandwich were also well received. Less successful was a venison medallion dish which Burrows said would have benefitted from more ageing.

"It's a problem that's not going away and what we're trying to do is keep the conversation going about how we might address it."

Mark McCoard

Marketers and DINZ have tried in the past to find new ways to present and prepare cuts from larger and/or older animals, but the initiative failed to produce quality outcomes, McCoard says. He wanted to revisit the issue and assemble a small team to take

a "fresh look" at opportunities, taking on board what didn't work last time. The initiative was raised by the DINZ marketing team at a recent meeting with the five venison processing companies. Positive "early discussions" had happened since.

"The understanding is that the industry will explore new dishes and products that could be sold at a higher price point than we currently have.

"Tyson proved that there are some good things we can do with this type of venison, and we want to keep the conversation going." ■

Justin Stevens, NZDFA Executive Chair
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Deer to Succeed

No recipe for success every time at weaning

Tony Leggett, *Deer Industry News* writer

No single recipe exists for deer farmers searching for the best weaning strategy for typically summer-dry Hawke's Bay.

A range of options were investigated at a "Deer to Succeed" seminar at Tikokino in mid-February, organised by the Hawke's Bay DFA based on a concept developed by NZDFA executive member Karen Middelberg.

The day was scheduled for mid-February 2023 but was scuttled by Cyclone Gabrielle's arrival in the region.

Two local deer farmers hosted 50 visitors in the morning to discuss their approach to weaning before an afternoon session which included a presentation from AgResearch deer scientist Dr David Stevens and smaller group sessions facilitated by local veterinarians Camille Flack and Richard Hilson.



GUIDANCE: Vets Richard Hilson and Camille Flack had words of advice and points to consider about weaning.

Settling on the best strategy depends on the property, farm system, management, feeding and aversion to risk of the herd owner or manager.

It is not uncommon in drought years for farmers to "just chuck the towel in" and leave the fawns on their mothers till after the rut. "But, if you decide to wean post-rut, it costs you over a couple of years or more, not just one."

Richard Hilson

Almost a third of the 20 herds represented at the seminar regularly post-rut weaned their fawns.

But Cyclone Gabrielle forced some to delay weaning last year and those seeking to return quickly to pre-rut weaning were warned to not expect an overnight fix.

Richard Hilson says if hinds were not weaned before the rut last year, this season's fawns will have arrived up to three weeks later than previous years.

"To crib that back you have to be prepared to bite the bullet. If your fawns are looking good and it's been quite a good season for pasture growth, you could wean say March 10 and pick up half of that 20 days later fawning date," Hilson says.

If hinds are high in condition score, they should also mate earlier and regain more of that 20 days delay.

"In the Cyclone year, most hinds were in good nick and it was just practicalities that forced farmers to wean after the rut."

Hilson says it is not uncommon in drought years for farmers to "just chuck the towel in" and leave the fawns on their mothers till after the rut.

"But, if you decide to wean post-rut, it costs you over a couple of years or more, not just one," he says.

AgResearch scientist Dr David Stevens says earlier research at Invermay showed when conception from natural mating was compared for groups mated pre and post-rut, the rates were high for both groups. But the post-rut group conceived 12 days later on average.

Stevens says conception date varies depending on nutrition but 12 days of lost growth is hard to recover.

"So last year when you had to post-rut wean because of the Cyclone but you had plenty of feed on offer, you didn't even notice it in the weaners. Heading into a drought, you will see a later conception date every time."

Later conception also has an effect on the liveweight of weaners by mid-winter. Stevens says regardless of how much feed is on offer, fawns will grow at about 500g/day or 6kg in their first 12 days of life. But for weaners born to post-rut weaned hinds, they will be 6kg lighter in late June.

"The only way to get around that 12 days is to have a huge amount of feed in front of those hinds."

Once below 1800kg of pasture cover, typical of a summer drought, hinds will start to lose weight in late lactation unless they are supplemented.

When farming in a region like Hawke's Bay, early weaning to preserve the condition score of hinds should be considered.

Further research last season at Invermay looked at weaning's effect on the immune system and also the impact of nutritional change on its development.

Early and late-weaned fawns were evaluated along with a 'leader-follower' grazing system, where the followers were grazing what was left behind by the earlier mobs.



GROUP CHAT: In a breakout session farmers got to discuss and share their own weaning strategies in a typically dry Hawke's Bay environment.

“I can tell you that weaning versus not weaning as a stressor did not worry their immune response to the vaccines and drenches we were giving them. It was the same regardless of whether they were still on their mums or not.”

By May 23, the pre-rut weaned mob of weaners was 72.4kg liveweight and post-rut were just on 80kg. But the difference a month later was slightly less, so there was still a post-rut weaning impact.

Feeding for liveweight gain

Access to green leaf is critical to maintaining liveweight gain in weaners. If it is short, supplementation helps a lot.

Another Invermay project looking at liveweight gain in fawns in January and February, then after weaning in March and April, compared the impact of different feeds and supplements.

The mobs on chicory before weaning were almost unchecked by weaning, reinforcing the importance of green leaf in their diet.

Stevens favours grain based supplement over baleage because it delivers a higher nutritional boost to help them through any weaning check.

Returning freshly weaned animals to the same paddocks they came out of may not be the best option if feed, particularly green leaf, is short.

“In that situation, I’d suggest using nanny hinds and putting them into better paddocks where growth rates will be better,” he says.

Homemade baleage is cheaper than most options, but on an energy-delivered basis, concentrated grain products deliver better growth rates.

He also questions the feeding of baleage (instead of other higher quality supplement) in the autumn just to get weaners used to it before the winter.

“You are basically sacrificing 4-5kg of growth in those weaners just to get them used to a supplement which will be fed in the winter when they won’t be growing anyway.”

Drenching

Drenching at weaning with magnesium is not a widely adopted strategy for calming weaners, but it is standard practice on some

Deer to Succeed was a Hawke’s Bay DFA event that other branches could take, adapt, and run with, branch chair Evan Potter says.

“It was run as a pilot to see if it was what farmers wanted and from the feedback received we know it was of practical value.”

The concept for the event came from the NZDFA executive team and on suggestion to the Hawke’s Bay branch was enacted. The event attracted a crowd of 60, including a few farmers from South Island DFA branches who were impressed with the format, he says.

Hawke’s Bay had developed a template and supporting notes on how the event was organised. This information had been shared with DINZ producer manager Lindsay Fung and Evan encourages other DFA branches to get hold of the information and consider running a similar event, adapting it to reflect regional differences.

He suspects that many branches are reluctant to commit to a field day or seminar due to the work involved. The Hawke’s Bay branch had removed that pressure, securing a grant from the DINZ Community Engagement fund to hire both a facilitator for the day and a coordinator in the lead-up to the event.

“DFA-led initiatives such as this are farmer led and can add real value to a deer farming business. We hope that these events raise the profile of the NZDFA and encourage more deer farmers to get involved with their local branch.”



RUN WITH IT: Hawke's Bay DFA chair Evan Potter encourages other branches to pick up and adapt accordingly the Deer to Succeed template.



LOST OPPORTUNITY: Conception date varies depending on nutrition but 12 days of lost growth is hard to recover, AgResearch scientist David Stevens says.

farms. One farmer said he had noticed a positive effect in weaners straight off the hill blocks that haven't been into the yards pre-weaning for a drench and tagging.

Most farmers at the seminar use Yersinivax and several are also using a Leptospirosis vaccine plus a clostridial vaccine.

Veterinarian Camille Flack warned farmers to expect a dip in weaner performance just after vaccination when giving them two 'gram-negative' vaccines (such as for Leptospirosis and Yersinia) at the same time.

"This is what sheep farmers see post vaccinating with Campyvax, another gram-negative vaccine," she says.

About half the group do a pre-wean tag and a drench for lungworm. Most of the pre-rut weaning group at the seminar followed the widely recommended 4-6 weeks drenching regime for weaners.

For the post-rut weaning group at the seminar, some didn't use any drench. Aside from replacements, all the weaners were sold off at weaning time.

Settled weaners thanks to nanny hinds

A sprinkling of 'nanny' hinds among mobs of newly-weaned fawns is a key component of Guy Wilson's weaning strategy on his family's central Hawke's Bay farm.

The calming effect of adult hinds makes moving and yarding mobs of young deer quicker and less risky, he says.

Weaning usually starts around mid-February after mobs of hinds and their fawns are slowly moved down off the hills to the front flats of his 350ha deer unit at Tikokino.

He favours tagging the fawns, giving them a lungworm drench plus a Yersiniavax a couple of weeks before weaning.

For the past two years, he has been matching fawns to their dam from a vantage point on top of a hay barn. That information is used two years later to pinpoint hinds producing the best stag progeny on their two-year velvet weight and using that in his hind culling decisions.

Deer were first farmed on the property in 1980, coming mostly from captured wapiti and wapiti-red stock from the Fiordland region before his father Robert decided to replace the entire herd with red deer, mostly bred on Rakaia bloodline stock from Warwick Gregory.



CALMING EFFECT: Adult or 'nanny' hinds have a settling influence, making the moving and yarding mobs of young deer quicker and less risky, Guy Wilson says.



ON FARM: Guy Wilson explaining the approach to weaning on his Tikokino farm.

About 500 hinds are mated to velvet sire stags and another 300 to venison sire stags. In the past five years, velvet weights have improved substantially with the purchase of sires from local stud breeder Grant Charteris, Forest Road, and Joe Crowley's Tower Farms stud at Cambridge.

The velvet herd comprises 340 mixed age stags, 120 R3s, 200 R2s and 220 weaners.

Guy returned home just over five years ago and spent the first nine months fencing another 80ha for deer before taking on more of the day-to-day management then leasing the farm from July 1 last year.

Total farm area is 570ha effective plus around 50ha of steep-sided gullies which have been fenced off, retired from grazing and planted.

An unusually good summer has delayed the weaning process this year by a week or so.

"I've usually started earlier than this, but we're having a great season, so I have slowed up our weaning date to avoid any risk from ryegrass staggers on our flats. Out on the hills, ryegrass staggers is not really an issue," Guy says.

The newly weaned deer from his mixed age hinds are run in four larger mobs of 160-170 head and progeny from the first-fawners are kept to about 120 head. Each mob includes four to five nannies.

"I find this helps a lot with moving them around. They stay settled and I feed maize grain for the first six weeks so they are used to me, used to following the bike around and they also get some balage too."

"By the end of it, I can open a gate and call them through and they pretty much wander through. I keep dog use to a minimum."

The nanny hinds are a mix of dries and older hinds that have been culled from the breeding herd.

"Last year I left the nannies in right till August and with venison spikers I put them in a 40ha paddock and left the nannies in there until I brought them down in December."

Until two years ago, standard practice was to return newly weaned fawns to the paddock they had been grazing. But last year, they

went to different, fresh paddocks and were just as settled as before, giving him the confidence to do this in the future.

Grain is fed at about 20-25% of their total feed requirements.

At weaning, they get a second Yersiniavax and an oral worm drench, mostly to eliminate lungworm, every 4-5 weeks. Weaners heading to slaughter get their last drench in August, and those destined for the velvet herd receive their final dose in late September.

No clostridial vaccine is used but Leptospirosis appeared last season for the first time, killing more than 10 healthy weaners in late April, so he is considering a vaccination to combat any repeat of that.

By the end of September, the weaners move out on to the hill blocks, and are replaced by the velvet stags which have usually been on crop from June to August.

The stags remain on or near the flats in mobs of 40-50, supplemented with palm kernel if necessary, but mostly on saved pasture which is growing rapidly by then.

Only wean on sunny days

Weather has a big influence on the selection of weaning date on Thomas Wilson's Central Hawke's Bay deer farm.

"Our aim is to keep weaning as simple as possible and we are pretty adamant about selecting a nice day. If it's raining or windy, we avoid those days because we find if we wean in the sun, animals are going out on to clean, dry paddocks and it's one less thing to stress about," Thomas says.

Having plenty of feed on offer is another critical success factor at weaning, he says.

"We make sure that on that first rotation after weaning our weaners are fully fed. If it gets out of control, we can rip a mob of trade lambs through to clean it up, just to keep the quality there."

Fawns are yarded first with their mothers in mid-January for tagging and a lungworm drench. Balage feeding starts at the same time, to introduce the feeder while the fawns and hinds are still together.

All 350 hinds are single-sire mated in small mobs, but once fawning finishes they often box up several mobs after tagging (an outcome from an Advance Party visit) to keep on top of the spring growth in the fawning paddocks.

Fawns get a second drench at weaning and go to fresh paddocks close to the shed. Most of the weaning paddocks are set up with three water troughs so stock have no trouble finding water.

He's wary of the risks of Yersinia, but with no sign of it showing up yet in his weaners, Thomas says he'll hold off vaccinating against the disease until it is necessary.

He lost a small number of weaners to leptospirosis two years ago in a very wet period but it has not required the introduction of a vaccination as standard practice. He now avoids that paddock post weaning in wet years.

Weaner deer are drenched every four to six weeks and cattle and sheep are integrated into the deer units to help remove deer parasites.

"I'm keen to know more about the risk of drench resistance occurring in our deer but in the meantime, drenching every four to six weeks is the programme."

Local veterinarian Richard Hilson says faecal egg counting in deer is challenging because they shed very low numbers of gut worms. However, a larval count for lungworm has some benefit but takes two days for results.

He says a useful guide to lungworm detection is to listen as deer slowdown from circling the quad bike and feed wagon to begin eating grain. If lungworm is an issue, they will start coughing at that point. ■



WEANING 101: Selecting a nice day, without wind or rain, is a prerequisite for successful weaning, Thomas Wilson says.

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From green, to gold, to grey

Trevor Walton, *Deer Industry News* writer

The 2023-24 season started well over most of the country but, by mid-February, the green had turned to gold in many regions. In a few – particularly inland Marlborough, much of the lower North Island, Tasman and parts of Canterbury and Otago – the gold was turning to grey.

Drought was setting in.

At Justin Stevens' farm at Seddon, eastern Marlborough, a strong hot southerly (yes, a hot southerly) was blowing up the coast when *Deer Industry News* visited. Dust was everywhere.

Normally Stevens has enough surplus pasture in spring to make silage and hay, but not this season. Since Christmas, all his deer had been on supplements. Wild plums and some tag on the hills were providing a bite for the hinds and stags, but basically the deer were living on baleage held over from the previous season, plus bought-in sheep nuts, PKE and barley.

A summer crop of rape for young stock was planted in October but, with little rain in November, it didn't provide much feed value. A paddock of lucerne fed the hinds and fawns until 20 December.

The Stevens' farm has a limited supply of water for irrigation. There's a dam on the farm and when river levels are high enough, access to ground water from the Awatere. He irrigates only at night and then only the lucerne and summer rape.

Stevens was well-prepared for a dry summer.

A couple of years ago, he decided to cut his deer numbers by 20 per cent, to make his farm more resilient in a drought. It was a good move; production fell by only 5 per cent and the cost of

feeding through the summer dry dropped dramatically.

As soon as he heard the current El Nino was on its way, he decided to kill all his older stags after their first cut of velvet.

"Everything over nine-years old; they're the first ones to pack-up in the dry. We've since also sold some of our less promising younger stags."

It was a matter of waiting for late February and the arrival of grape marc – crushed grapes after wine-making. Grape marc is a great supplement and the hinds do well on it. From April he will also be able to run deer in his vineyard.

In the meantime, he was feeding the hinds to maintain them. "They're self-feeding on red clover baleage and sheep nuts from Advantage feeders. I prefer nuts because everything is ground up, making it more digestible. If I get a big order of nuts, I get a test report to check on the ME – the metabolisable energy – because that's what I am paying for.

"They're eating about 1.5 kg of nuts per day with their fawns at foot. I know from past experience that if I wasn't feeding them nuts, I'd be looking at a 10-15 per cent reduction in fawning next year."

In North Canterbury, Lyndon Matthews of Puketira Deer was also well-prepared for the summer dry when we spoke to him in mid-



QUALITY RATIONS: When the feed value from pasture is close to nil and the bulk of the diet is baleage or silage, Advantage feeders are great for ensuring good hind body condition scores in the run up to mating.

February. He said it was dry at Waikari, but not abnormally so. He says most deer farmers in his district expect a dry month or two after Christmas and farm accordingly.

True droughts – “where the hills go from gold to grey” – occur maybe once every seven years.

“We cut as much silage as we can in the good years, to carry us over the dry years. We grow barley to provide grain for the deer and straw for the cattle. We also grow raphno for the deer, which they don’t really like, but is very water-efficient. It comes away very quickly after autumn rain,” says Lyndon.

“We are set up pretty well for a one-off drought. Things become more difficult when we have two droughts in a row.

In those years we get rid of those animals we can’t afford to feed and throw the cheque book at those we keep.

“Our aim is to make sure our deer stay in good condition, regardless of the drought. We want it to be business as usual once the drought breaks.”

The Matthews wean each year on 20 February after training the fawns to eat their post-weaning tucker while they are still on their mums.

In a typically dry autumn they supplement the fawns with balage and barley, and the hinds with pit silage and barley. In more difficult years they’ve successfully fed newly-weaned fawns from Advantage feeders and hinds on barley straw and PKE.

Back in Marlborough, Upper Wairau Valley farmer Euan Rentoul, an industry veteran, says it’s crucial to set goals for how you plan to manage the dry and to keep making decisions as the season progresses.



WELL-PREPARED: Lyndon Matthews was well set up for drought conditions with pit silage, barley and raphno on hand for deer.

“You might decide in advance that if it hasn’t rained by, say, 1 February, you’re going to drop something. If you are a breeder, quit hinds and adult animals before replacements.

“Because you are limited in what you can do with deer – they can only be grazed in deer fenced areas – it also makes sense to carry some stock, like store sheep, that can easily be dropped or grazed elsewhere.”

Marilyn and Giselle Shewan also farm in the Wairau valley. They point out that destocking is great, just so long as you can get killing space. They had been trying for months to get killing space for their cull velvet stags when we visited. With the roar



FRUSTRATING: Wairau Valley deer farmers Giselle and Marilyn Shewan in late January. They prepared well for a drought, but the lack of killing space for their cull velvetting stags was frustrating.

approaching, they faced feeding old stags for no gain for another two or three months.

Marlborough is known for its droughts, so it wasn’t surprising to find each of the three Marlborough deer farmers we visited in late January was relatively positive.

Each of them started feeding supplements early in the dry, to avoid hammering their pastures, with the hope that they will come away quickly in the autumn but, if the drought lasts long enough, they will sacrifice some paddocks – using them as feeding platforms.

Target liveweights for finishing stock have to be sacrificed too. They said the focus needs to be on keeping replacements growing and improving hind condition in the run-up to mating.

In the words of Euan Rentoul, it’s human nature to hang onto trading stock and finishers, to keep them growing to target weights. “Don’t do this. As soon as they hit killable weights, they should be out the gate,” he advises. “And if you need to sell breeding stock, start with your oldest animals.”



GET A PLAN: Euan Rentoul has farmed through a fair few droughts. He says having a plan and sticking to it is crucial when dealing with a drought.

One of the most important ingredients in the recipe for getting through a summer dry or drought is a plentiful, fail-safe supply of stock water.

Justin Stevens admits to losing 10 stags one year because of a supply failure. Without water, stags soon go down.

Deer feeders are not an excuse to feed and forget

Advantage stock feeders are being used by many deer farmers. They ensure deer have constant access to supplementary feeds with minimal wastage.

Seddon deer farmer Justin Stevens has some tips for their use:

- To reduce bullying and to ensure every animal gets access to the feed, it's better to have two small feeders – spaced well apart – than a single large feeder
- There's an ideal pellet size for each model of feeder. If the pellets are too small, they can flow out on the ground. Too big and you can get blockages



IDEAL: Justin Stevens with the size of pellet that works best in his Advantage feeders

- If you are buying a big order of pellets, specify the ME you are looking for and then test to check that you are getting what you ordered. The cost of the test is small relative to the cost of the feed
- To reduce the risk of birds flicking pellets, grain or peas out of the feeder trough (and deer gorging on these), don't place the feeders under trees where birds congregate
- Prevent deer from gorging on peas as these swell in the gut when the deer drink. This can be fatal
- A 50/50 mix (by volume) of grain and PKE flows better through the feeder than grain or PKE alone. Also, there's a much smaller risk of getting grain-related acidosis.
- Stock feeders are great, but they're not an excuse to 'fill and forget'. Stock, feed and water need regular monitoring, especially in a drought.

Drought Deer Fact updated

For drought management tips, check out the 'Drought feeding and management' Deer Fact. An updated version is included in this issue of Deer Industry News. Please insert this in the nutrition section of your black Deer Fact ring binder and discard the old version.

You'll also find the Deer Fact on the DINZ website, www.deernz.org.nz. Search for Deer Facts.

"The vet said severe dehydration leads to permanent kidney damage from which deer never recover. That was a lesson well-learned."

He now has an electronic monitoring system for his water supply tanks. There's a screen showing tank levels on the wall above the kitchen bench and he gets alerts on his smartphone if something is awry. For \$500-\$1000 to monitor several tanks, it's money well spent.

The Rentouls have reticulated water to all paddocks, fed by two wells and two pumps. The system is designed so that if one pump or well goes down, the remaining pump can feed the whole system.

The Shewans usually physically check all their troughs every day during summer but during Christmas, when they had other things on their mind, Marilyn's husband Jim checked all the troughs using a drone.

It's proving to be a tough summer for the Shewans, with their farm looking increasingly like what daughter Giselle describes as "a desert". But they haven't lost their sense of humour. She has a strategy for encouraging rain. It's quite simple – leave some hay outside, uncovered.

"Sacrificial hay left in the paddock has been proven, time after time, to bring on rain." ■

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Improving efficiencies in a venison system

A productive and profitable venison breeding and finishing system hinges on both biological and economic efficiency, agricultural consultant Wayne Allan says.

This article started off with the objective of defining how much it costs to produce a kilogram of venison. However, the cost of production is heavily dependent on the efficiency of the production system. Every farm has different resources and different production efficiencies so defining a single cost of production for the industry became an impossible and meaningless exercise. But it quickly became apparent that the more efficient the production system the lower the cost of production. Despite a focus on added value and high value markets, which are undoubtedly important, individual farmers can have some control over their own destiny by focusing on improving efficiencies in their production systems. This article separates the breeding and finishing components of a venison system and explores the key factors that make them more, or less efficient, from a biological viewpoint.



FULLY FED: In 2023 the first line of hybrids from Goudies Station, Reporoa, averaged a 74.1kgCW. Deer manager Chris Smith says one of the key contributors to production efficiency is the preferential feeding of hinds and fawns at critical times.

Efficiency of production - breeding system

In a breeding system the efficiency of production can be crudely defined as the kilogram weaned per kilogram of hind wintered, or alternatively kilogram per hectare. In addition to this the impact of the replacement hind fawns also need to be considered. Variables that are important to this calculation include:

- Size of the hind
- Reproductive performance (fawns weaned per hind wintered)
 - Scanning percentage, particularly where it impacts the required replacement rate.
- Weaning weight of the fawn (and weaning date)
- Replacement rate in the herd (typically 13 – 20%).
- Stocking rate

While an animal may have been biologically efficient last month, this may not be the case the following month!

There is a huge range in the efficiency of production across farms. In this instance we will look at two scenarios.

Scenario 1 – High production efficiency

- 110 kg hind
- 94% fawn survival
- 60 kg weaner
- 16% replacement rate
- 3% death rate in hinds

In this instance there is 0.513 kg weaned per kg of hind wintered, in addition there is one yearling hind wintered for every six breeding hinds.

Scenario 2 – Low production efficiency

- 110 kg hind
- 85% fawn survival
- 50 kg weaner
- 20% replacement rate
- 5% death rate in hinds

In this instance there is 0.386 kg weaned per kg of hind wintered, in addition there is one yearling wintered for every 5 hinds. This system is producing 25 % less product from the same weight of hind than Scenario 1, and this reduction is likely to be greater when compared on a per hectare basis.

It should be noted that the range of efficiency will vary from the two hypothetical examples given, some farms will be more efficient than Scenario 1 and others less efficient than Scenario 2.

Keys to improving production efficiency:

- Aim for optimal hind condition at fawning to increase fawn survival and early lactation from the hind.
- Maintain/boost feed quality in late lactation when the fawn is more reliant on pasture than milk. Good feeding at this time will also benefit hind condition at mating, and subsequent conception rates.
- Mating weight of yearling hinds, aim for 80 – 90% of the mature weight – refer to the growth curves for replacement hinds on Deer Hub.
- Sire genetics – seek out high growth sires including terminal sires which will give bigger weaners, providing nutrition over lactation is adequate.

Scenario 1 may not require any more feed over a 12 month period to achieve the higher efficiency, however it does require stock to be fed appropriately, particularly in the critical late lactation period. Moving hinds and fawns off fawning country to better feed from mid-January, or the addition of high quality supplement can be hugely beneficial to weaning weights and hind condition. Focus on the late lactation is particularly important in a dry environment or where feed quality is poor.

Efficiency of production – finishing system

The efficiency of production in a finishing system is driven by liveweight gains, particularly in autumn and spring, as well as the death rate within the system. It all comes down to the proportion of feed that is directed to maintenance, which keeps the animal functioning - but not growing, and feed partitioned to growth.

The faster the liveweight gain the more efficient the system is from the feed point of view. This is difficult to achieve through the winter months when the biological clock and cost of feed are both against the deer. However, the management and type of feed given is critically important through the autumn and spring when the potential for growth is high.

In order to achieve high liveweight gains the deer need to be offered an abundance of high quality feed: leafy green grass, legumes and herbs or high quality supplement such as grain which may also be economic in the shoulders of the season.

The genetics of the animal are also important with hybrid and larger red genetics able to grow faster than smaller red genetics. Typically stags also have a growth rate advantage over hinds.

It is important to note that as animals get bigger their maintenance requirements increase, and as animals approach mature weight, or cut teeth or reach puberty their live-weight gains may decline. While an animal may have been biologically efficient last month, this may not be the case the following month!

Climate and animal health can also negatively impact liveweight gains, even when stock are on high quality feed. Deaths are simply a wastage in the system which has a direct impact on the efficiency of production.

Scenario 3: High production efficiency

- Lowland specialist finisher
- Purchase 55 kg weaners 1 March
- Mean sale date 1 November @ 55 kg carcass weight (100 kg liveweight)
- Average liveweight gain 185 g/d (purchase to sale)
- 280 g/day autumn, 100 g/d winter, 300 g/d spring
- 3% death rate



TOP TUCKER: Lots of quality feed in late lactation is one way to boost production efficiency.

Scenario 4: Low production efficiency

- Longer winter, lower quality pastures
- Purchase 55 kg weaner 1 March
- Mean sale date 1 January @ 55 kg (104 kg liveweight)
- Average liveweight gain 160 g/d (purchase to sale)
- 180 g/d autumn, 80 g/d winter, 250 g/day spring, 200 g/d summer
- 6% death rate

Despite that same carcass weight per head Scenario 3 produces slightly more venison due to the lower death rate, however Scenario 4 is considerably less efficient due largely to increased feed consumption. According to the feed tables on Deer Hub it requires around 16% more feed, most of which is associated with the maintenance requirement over the additional 60 days the animals are on farm. In both finishing scenarios the stags could be held longer to get a cut of velvet. This will add income but if the velvet yield is not sufficient, may take feed away from a class of stock that could give a higher overall return.

Biological efficiency vs economic efficiency

While biological efficiency (discussed above) is about the efficient conversion of feed to carcass weight; economic efficiency is about maximising the returns for the feed that is eaten. In a farming system we often make decisions where we know we could get extra production but choose to make decisions where we can make the most money. For example, when chilled season prices are \$1 - \$2/kg more than post-chilled prices, it makes sense to sell into the chilled market; particularly for dryland farmers that can achieve good carcass weights in early spring. Other farmers will choose to sell stock in order to free up feed for something that will make them a higher return over the subsequent period or hold appropriate stock for the emerging elk contract market. ■

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In summary

To maximise the breeding and/or finishing potential of your venison system understand the key things that drive productivity and profitability in your farming system, and consider:

- Feed – matching feed availability and quality to the demands of stock classes throughout the year. For more on feeding: [Deer Hub > Feeding](#); [Deer Facts > Management for Profit and Deer Facts > Nutrition](#)
- Genetics – selecting the traits and sires to suit your system and utilising the tools and resources available such as [Deer Select](#) to support decision making. For more on genetics: [Deer Select](#), [Deer Hub > breeding](#), and [Deer Facts > breeding](#)



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Angular limb deformity

In 2022, the Deer Science for Success programme, a collaboration between Deer Industry New Zealand and AgResearch, undertook a survey to identify the prevalence and impact of angular limb deformity (ALD) in deer on New Zealand farms.

ALD is due to abnormal bone growth (osteochondrosis) a condition which occurs in many other species, including pigs, horses and humans. This abnormal bone growth leads to curvature of the radial bone and the appearance of angled limbs below the carpus (see image). In deer, the deformity strikes young deer with unclosed radial growth plates resulting in a either knock-knee (varus) or bow-legged (valgus) appearance in one or both front legs.

It's difficult to investigate and determine the exact cause of ALD because the damage is done well before the angulation is obvious. The cause is nearly always multifactorial; however, an important risk factor is fast growth. In deer, we think a combination of trauma to the radial growth plate during rapid growth in the first spring, in conjunction with nutritional factors are likely to be the main drivers of the syndrome. There is suspicion that a nutritional contributor to ALD is copper deficiency during the late winter/early spring although this has not been definitively proven.

The survey established that the condition has been observed in elk/wapiti, hybrid and red deer, in both venison and velvet genetic animals. It did occur in females but was far more prevalent in males. There were more reported cases of ALD in velvet-bred red

deer, however this is likely due to the slaughter of venison animals before the angulation of the limb is obvious.

Surveyed farmers noticed animals with the condition from after their first winter up until two-years-old, although it was most commonly noticed from January to March at spiker velvetting. Farmers reported that the animals with the deformity appeared otherwise normal and did not show noticeable lameness, and many cut good velvet weights.

Deer with ALD are predisposed to osteoarthritis when they get to five to six-years-old, so slaughter should be considered prior to this occurring. Certification requirements for transportation of ALD animals to a deer slaughter plant should be discussed with your veterinarian. There is usually no problem with sending these animals with a vet certificate and there appears to be no downgrades of carcass due to the deformity.

In summary, ALD is a permanent condition that cannot be treated, and the multifactorial nature of its cause means advice around prevention is difficult. However, gentle handling and shifting of young deer to reduce trauma to rapidly growing growth plates, and implementing a copper supplementation programme if deficits occur in late winter/early spring may help to reduce the prevalence of the condition. ■

Samantha Elder is a Southland vet.



Radius (bone)

The angulation of the limb is due to damage of the distal radial growth plate (circled). This causes the whole radius bone to grow abnormally, but despite the outward appearance does not involve the carpal joint.

Carpal joint

This is an example of a lateral deviation "valgus" as the legs splay out below the location of the cause of the deviation.

On farm GHG mitigation strategies

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

The autumn kill of weaner stags or introducing a velvet antler enterprise are options to improve the greenhouse gas emissions intensity of deer, according to a Science for Success model analysis by AgResearch scientist David Stevens.

The estimated emissions of farmed deer, according to MPI’s Agricultural Inventory Advisory Panel is 35.14kg CO₂E/kg. But in model data scenarios as part of a Science for Success environmental impact project AgResearch scientist David Stevens showed that swinging an ‘average’ deer farm towards an autumn kill strategy could potentially reduce emissions to 23.28 GHGkg/kg product on an average Hawke’s Bay farm, and 20.83 GHGkg/kg product on an Otago/Southland farm.

The autumn kill scenario used data from past research to predict the potential to supply young deer for slaughter in autumn, using a hind liveweight of 130kg and stag genetics to produce fast growing progeny. The modelled figures proved that a larger hind produced heavier weaned progeny which reached slaughter weight sooner. Stevens noted that the success of this emissions reducing strategy hinged on the increased emissions of a larger hind being offset by the increased carcass weight of progeny.

Shifting production towards products that have a higher value (autumn kill or velvet antler) will increase the ability of the farmer to pay for future (emissions) liabilities.

Adding a velvet antler enterprise and substituting venison for velvet antler production reduced kilograms of product per hectare. However, the increased kilogram value of velvet produced a much higher gross margin, and lower emissions per \$GM.

In the Executive Summary Steven’s concluded that greenhouse gas emissions are largely driven by drymatter intake and that altering efficiencies of production provides little change in total emissions per hectare.

“However, shifting production towards products that have a higher value (autumn kill or velvet antler) will increase the ability of the farmer to pay for future (emission) liabilities.”

Method

The objective of Stevens’ project, ‘Greenhouse Gas Emissions from New Zealand Deer Farming Systems’ was to quantify how autumn finishing, improved hind longevity, improved calf growth, and the inclusion of a velvet antler production herd may alter GHG profiles and improve efficiency in an ‘average’ venison production system.

The metrics for the average farm were based on the population statistics of the New Zealand deer herd, sourced from Statistics

NZ’s Agricultural Survey and the Deer Pro national slaughter register.

The mitigation strategies were applied to two farm systems, one in Otago/Southland and the other in Hawke’s Bay. The South Island farm was based on the Invermay deer research farm, a typical hill country farm for the southern region running 100% deer. The North Island farm was based on a Hawke’s Bay mixed livestock former Focus farm .

For the hind longevity scenario modifications were made to the reproduction parameters of mating and calving performance. The calf growth scenario used the standard reproductive parameters, while increasing growth rates in autumn and spring to alter the potential supply of weaners to slaughter. The velvet antler scenario used Statistics NZ data that mirrored the average composition of the New Zealand herd and was an amalgam of both venison and velvet production. ■

Results

In Otago/Southland the average system produced emissions of 25.01kgGHG/kg product. This figure reduced under the hind longevity, calf growth and autumn kill mitigation scenarios to 23.29kgs, 22.51kgs, and 20.83kgs respectively, but increased to 29.57kgs under the velvet antler scenario.

In Hawke’s Bay the average system produced 26.13kgGHG/kg product. The Hawke’s Bay results differed slightly due to the inclusion of sheep and beef outputs. Within the deer enterprise the autumn kill scenario produced both a lower total footprint compared to the average (4,124 kg/ total ha (CO₂E) vs 3979kg/total ha (CO₂E)) and lower per footprint per kg of product (18.97kgGHG/kg product vs 17.94kgGHG/kg).

In both the North Island and South Island scenarios the greatest GHG reductions from the average were reflected in the kgGHG/\$GM metric. In the South Island the reductions ranged from 10 – 22%, and in the North Island 3 – 21%. These results indicated a “greater ability” of the farmer to pay any potential tax or emissions obligations,” the report said.

For a copy of the report or more information contact DINZ policy and research manager Emil Murphy.

Own it

PGG Wrightson genetics manager Graham Kinsman encouraged deer farmers to “own and drive their industry.” His words followed the presentation of a purple rosette award by the Elk & Wapiti Society at their annual velvet competition for his almost 30 years of service to the deer industry. The “own it” comment was in relation to the demise of Cervena, the unique name and food story the industry had funded and developed over the last 30 years. Cervena had been sidelined by both Alliance and Silver Fern Farms, which he said was a shame, and he encouraged farmers with similar views to voice their concerns.

Kinsman usually takes the front of crowd position at the many deer sales he coordinates throughout the country, but it’s the behind the scenes work that make the difference. “Communication and negotiation are everything,” he said.

There was a lot of negotiating and ‘relationship management’ when he led the realignment of the stud deer sales calendar about 20 years ago.

“The sales calendar was very fragmented, and I felt we needed a more structured itinerary.”

The stud sales calendar that buyers and sellers take for granted nowadays evolved over a series of “big meetings” and animated discussions with some “big personalities,” he said.

Kinsman still enjoys the cut-and-thrust of the intense and all-consuming selling season.

His deer selling career was preceded with deer farm management roles in New Zealand and Australia. PGG Wrightson manager Philip Irwin encouraged Graham to take on the role of South Island deer agent and over time that evolved to a specialist role with stud stock. He said deer farmers were a unique subset of NZ’s farming industry.

“It’s a drafting gate industry, to get into it you’ve got to be a bit different, and there’s another drafting gate off the deer farmer mob if you want to join the stud industry.”



PRIZE EFFORT: Graham Kinsman’s support of the deer industry was acknowledged by the Elk & Wapiti Society.

Obituary

Jolly good fellow

Bruce Niven was good company, hardworking and committed to the deer industry, Craig Hocken said at Niven’s funeral in February. Speaking on behalf of the Central Region’s DFA Hocken said Niven was a relative late-comer to the industry starting out with venison production on a smallish farm at

Makara in the early 2000s while running a Wellington real estate business. His deer farming interest blossomed following the sale of his business and purchase and moving with wife Margaret to a deer farm at Otaki.

“Bruce caught the velvet bug and changed his farming practice from fattening stags to growing velvet,” Hocken said.

Keen to grow his deer farming knowledge, Niven joined the Central Regions DFA and local Advance Party group. He was an active branch committee member holding the role of treasurer for several years. He also had a starring role at the venison burger stand at the Central Districts Field Days, a big fundraiser for the DFA branch where, over three days, up to 2500 burgers were sold.

“Bruce was our ‘pin up boy’ who pulled in the customers. Sometimes he caused a queue from talking too much but it worked. He really did have the gift of the gab.”

Niven’s competitive streak took hold, and he was a regular entrant of velvet heads in the DFA branch competition, targeting the quality and style classes. It took a few attempts before he finally won the category in 2020.

“He was so happy and walked around like the cat that got the cream.”

As well as attending competitions and dinners, the Nivens hosted local and wider deer industry events a more recent one a Chinese delegation hosted by DINZ.

Hocken concluded acknowledging Niven’s commitment to the industry.

“Bruce was always good company and loved his deer farm.” ■



DEDICATED: Bruce Niven loved his deer and was committed to the industry.

Obituary

Don Gregson

Long-serving treasurer of the NZDFA and trustee of the Ian Spiers Trust Don Gregson passed away in mid-February. The chartered accountant had an involvement with fallow deer and was awarded life membership of the NZDFA for outstanding service over 16 years, ending in 2002. Former NZDFA councillor and chair David Stevens described Gregson as a well-respected treasurer with a penchant for fine wine “who kept us on track in a gentlemanly way.”

“He was great company and got along with everybody and did a great job.”

Deer Industry News extends to the Gregson family sympathy and sincere appreciation of Don’s contribution to the New Zealand deer industry.

BBQ venison leg fillet with eggplant parmigiana, grilled asparagus and tomato fondant



Graham Brown, DINZ executive chef

4
SERVES

Ingredients

2 leg fillets (800 g) of venison

1 large eggplant

1 punnet of cherry Italian acid-free tomatoes

1 bunch of fresh asparagus or green beans

1 head of garlic

100 ml of EVO olive oil

2 cups of panko breadcrumbs

50 g of good parmesan cheese grated fine

1 egg

½ cup of seasoned flour

Fresh herbs - basil, thyme, Italian parsley, oregano

Sea salt and black pepper

Preparation

Use half the basil and chop fine with the rest of the herbs.

Marinate the venison in this mix for at least an hour before cooking.

Method

Place tomatoes in a small dish with the garlic broken into cloves in a suitable dish and cover with remaining olive oil and the chopped stems of the basil. Place in oven at 160°C for about 2 hours until tomatoes are just softened but still whole.

Peel the asparagus stems.

Slice the eggplant length ways about 8-10 mm thick, brush with olive oil and grill each side until brown and eggplant is just soft. Cool.

Make up egg wash and seasoned flour and mix parmesan cheese with panko crumbs. Crumb the eggplant and set aside.

On a hot grill or BBQ season and sear the venison until well browned and continue cooking until an internal temperature of 52°C remove to a warm place in a dish to rest, keep the juices.

Season the asparagus with salt pepper and grill on the same BBQ plate until just soft. Keep warm.

Heat a heavy pan with oil and cook the eggplant until crispy and browned.

Put the reserved juices from the venison into a small pan with some balsamic vinegar and the garlic cloves from the tomatoes along with some of the tomato oil and heat until it's well mixed season.

To serve

Slice the venison into 10 slices per fillet, place on the eggplant garnish with the grilled asparagus and the tomato fondants and dress with the Balsamic reduction and a few sprigs of fresh basil leaves and garlic cloves. ■



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