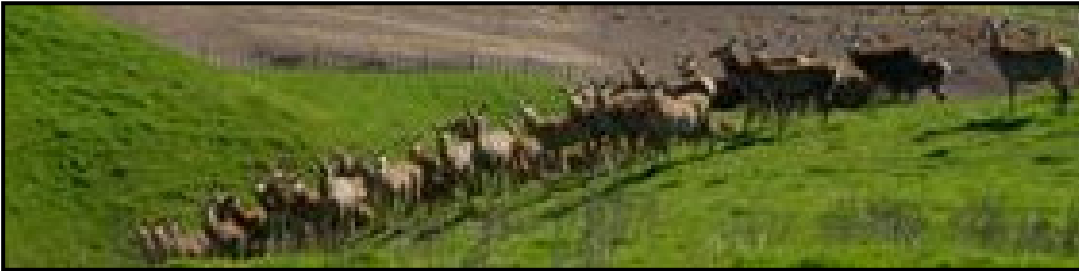


# "Making the DIFFerence"

## DEER INDUSTRY FOCUS FARMS PROJECT

### Northern Regions – DAVID AND KAY DEWAR: NGAKURU

Issue 2  
April 2009



#### Community Group Introduction

On behalf of the Focus Farm Community Group, can I thank those who are continuing to come to the open days and support what we are doing in the region. We hope that the innovation and monitoring programmes will provide 'food for thought' as we continue through the second year. A special thanks to David & Kaye for their ongoing enthusiasm for the project and the additional workload it puts on them and the team that supports them.

Over the past month we have completed the large AI programme. The facilities proved a hit with the last 50 inseminations being completed in just over the hour. The team got things very well under control. More on the breeding programme in an additional article.

The new stags have been settled on to the property and are now doing their jobs as back-up duties are required.

The ongoing monitoring is gathering some interesting data and the spray topping & animal health programmes seem to be producing the goods.

So we look forward to seeing you at the **next field day on Wednesday, 3 June 2009.**

In the meantime there will be an Electronic ID and Traceability field day on at Rangitaiki Station on Friday, 24 April from 1:00pm for all those interested in this topic. Shouldn't we all be?

Andy Mitchell, Focus Farm Community Group Chairman.

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#### Upcoming events

**Next field day to be held  
on**

**Wednesday, 3 June 2009**  
**at Landcorp's Rangitaiki**  
**Station, Taupo**

*While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of its content, this newsletter alone is not to be substituted for direct advice on any matter addressed.*



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#### On-Farm Update: as at 17<sup>th</sup> April 2009

Once again the dreaded dry has hit the Central Plateau causing the quantity and quality of pasture to decline. Fortunately rain in February combined with de-stocking of yearlings and lambs has produced a reasonable feed supply (1900 kgDM/ha) on the Dewar farm heading into winter. This is a major improvement on the 1300 kgDM/ha experienced last year.



Another year of yearling sales is all but over, with a mean sale date of 3<sup>rd</sup> January and an average carcase weight of 50kg. This was slightly behind last year with an average sale date of 27<sup>th</sup> December and a 51kg carcase weight. This wasn't a bad result considering the weaner weights were 13kg behind at weaning 2008.

Weaning in early March produced an average of 50.2kg weaners (stag and hind fawns). Dave is sceptical about this weight and thinks the stags are much better than this. He suspects animals are pushing the gate in the weigh crate open with multiple weighing. He will weigh again in early May to confirm.

To date 230 weaners have been purchased with a further 300 expected to be bought in. Given the current high prices and scarcity of these animals, the purchase of other stock classes such as hinds or trading cattle will be considered.

The 215 breeding hinds on hand are in excellent condition (3.5-4.0 estimate). The hinds were in four mobs with three mobs of 50 hinds that were artificially inseminated and one mob of naturally mated hinds. This is designed to compare weaner growth between proven AI stags and the home grown stags.

The weaners are currently grazing the spray topped area which is providing quality pasture. There will be much interest in the weaner growth rates over this period with an expectation they will be 200g/day or better on this quality feed.

The major decisions for the farm at this point are what to purchase and when, with the main aim of optimising farm profit.

Mark Macintosh, Facilitator.



# “Making the DIFFerence”

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#### The Breeding Programme

What are the main objectives of any deer breeding programme?

- Maximise the number of fawns weaned against the number of hinds mated.
- Maximise the weight of those animals weaned.
- Optimise the hind base towards the maximum efficiency of hinds bio-mass farmed to weaner bio-mass produced.

In order to achieve these goals we need to take a look at all factors that might enhance the outcomes of the commercial farmer's breeding programme. The Northern Regions Focus Farm (the property/operation of David Dewar), has traditionally been a very good performer in terms of number of fawns weaned and usually exceeds 94% weaning to mating.

There is very robust survey information showing NZ mixed age hind pregnancy rates lie between 68 to 94%, with first fawners 11 to 92 %. We aim to be at the top of this range which will be one factor in driving profitability forward.

Bringing the conception date forward is also important. This provides more fawns earlier and also matches the pasture growth curve. Previous studies show most conceptions in deer occur between April 1<sup>st</sup> & April 17<sup>th</sup> (58.8%).

This year we are altering conception dates by doing a significant AI programme on the farm. 150 of 215 hinds on farm were bought into an AI programme. With a good result, 75% of these 150 hinds will hold to AI insemination thus have a conception date of March 22<sup>nd</sup>.

The other major factor was the genetic effect on the size of the progeny. Subsequently the Focus Farm has acquired two new sets of genetics. The first is a 75% Wapiti bull; the second is an elite set of Eastern European top EBV12MTH semen and sons package. These have been given 50 hinds each in the AI programme, and are backing up their own groups. The third 50 we have used a stag/bull of strong Wapiti type from Dave's own breeding programme that he rates as his best bull (there are no formal statistics to support this assertion). The residual 65 hinds have been mated in a traditional process using more of Dave's crossbred (Wapiti/Red) stags/bulls.

This programme will monitor the economics of using such a system in a commercial venison operation. There are a number of operators providing high BV venison sires for commercial AI so this information is very valuable to our Focus Farm followers. We anticipated the costs of semen, hind preparation and insemination to be around \$100 per hind. To date it has cost \$24.96 per hind. We will report on the full costs later in the programme when all the bills are available.

At \$100 per hind it is of course a total budgeted cost of \$15,000 if semen was to be purchased. The Focus Farm has chosen to purchase two major components of the programme and therefore we are harvesting the semen from these two sources (although in the first year we are using Sonny Bill semen from Canterbury Imported Deer). This has been provided to the programme in a very special deal so in that regard we are very lucky indeed. It should be noted that DIL and a Wapiti breeder also offered their resources in favourable deals.

Follow the costs and economics as they unfold. At present we need an extra 11 or 12kgs at weaning per fawn at \$9 per kg to break even! So watch this space...

Andy Mitchell, Breeding Programme Coordinator.



# “Making the DIFFerence”

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#### Focus Farmer Update: March 2009

Since the last field day things have been moving along fairly fast. We weaned on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of March and weaners looked good, but I have doubts about weights as the hinds and stags were the same weight. They will all be weighed again at the next drench to see how they are going.

CIDRS in three mobs of 50 hinds on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, things went well. CIDRS out on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March at 6, 8 and 10am, all went well and Garth reckons a lot better than shearing as runs are shorter and smokos longer and better, what with Kay’s biscuit tin and Rachael’s muffins and chocolate cake.

The AI on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March started off as a bit of a mission with the old girls not playing the game at all, but after a couple of suggestions from Lynne Rhodes, the technician, nothing that four guys, three girls, three grandchildren, a geriatric heading dog and a foxy couldn’t handle happened. We finished at 7pm and after a few beers, a barbecue and a few laughs, all problems were forgotten.



Summer crops. There’s too much to be eaten off and go back into grass on time so we have left one paddock for winter feed, - could be handy as the swedes are nothing startling. Have purchased some weaners at \$4.50 and \$3.50 which is pleasing

after all the talk of big money going around. More weaners are needed so off to Taihape on the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of April, but fear I might be a bit timid for down there.

Some eczema in the lambs but no sign of it in the deer. Nights are getting colder so hopefully that is the end of the eczema, also can’t wait for daylight saving to finish. Bloody townies.

David, Focus Farmer.



# “Making the Difference”

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### Northern Regions – DAVID AND KAY DEWAR: NGAKURU

#### Animal Health Update

We are again monitoring a group of weaners for copper levels. The first liver biopsies were done on the 20<sup>th</sup> of March, a few weeks after weaning. Last year the copper levels in the weaners dropped from 705umol/kgm in March to 193umol/kgm in August. Copper levels would be expected to drop on the Focus Farm over this period. It is interesting that they still dropped despite the addition of palm kernel extract (pke) to the diet in April, May and June. Pke is richer in copper than the pasture or crop that would have been the alternative feed source.

At present we have an application being processed for funding from the Sustainable Farming Fund, looking to investigate the subject of feeding pke in deer. The aim is to assess the economic and health benefits in using this supplement in terms of growth rate advantages and trace element differences - especially copper.

Worms. Those who came to the last field day heard Simone Hoskin's comments that I passed on in her absence. Particularly regarding the severity of worm burdens in seasons where we have rain after 3 to 4 week dry spells. This year has been one of those years. The weaners have already had 2 drenches. From now on we will continue to FEC and larval count as we did last year, rationalising drench usage on the farm.

Breeding programme. Andy has put a lot of work into this programme that he outlines in this newsletter very well. He did an excellent job of researching, planning and organising the whole procedure. Dave has also described the AI episodes!! Plenty of helpers despite the start times. And great food. We were a pretty polished team!

Remembering the 'more venison earlier' theme, this synchronised conception almost 3 weeks earlier than the mean NZ conception date should give very positive benefits. 300gm/day for an extra 20 days - an extra 6kgs. This is before any of the benefits that the higher weight gain sires will give to these weaners in their first 9 months.

Pregnancy testing will be done in the first 10 days of next month so we can then evaluate the conception date.

Robin Hopkirk, Facilitator.

- Sorry there are a few slight conflicts in the newsletter. These are largely due to the information updates that occurred over the 3 week span in which the 4 contributors penned their articles. - Ed.

