

"Making the Difference"

DEER INDUSTRY FOCUS FARMS PROJECT

Central Regions – "THE STEYNING"

Time for another newsletter after another good Field Day last week- an update for those of you who couldn't attend or were too far away to make it.

With a view to taking the pressure off Tim Aitken and Lucy Robertshawe, our DIFF Monitor Farmers, we had a visit to "Maranoa", the deer farm of John and Marie Spiers at Takapau. With a large group of about 90 attendees it was a bit hard to draw questions from the crowd but we looked at and discussed the highly successful R2 hind mating programme (scanning 95-99%), R2 and MA hind management (including a self feed silage system), a wonderful riparian planting established over 20 years ago and a look at a chicory stand that is coming up for that super-productive second year.

The afternoon session was rather full, with a few last minute add-in presentations swallowing up a bit of time all day. The main items were a look at Duncan Holden's highly successful fodder beet crop for finishing deer, a review of industry deer drenching practices from Simone Hoskin and then a wrap up of things that have been going on at the Monitor farm and the scanning results in the wider HB area.

We also had deer industry royalty in attendance with John Scurr, Bill Taylor, David Stevens and Tony Pearse. John Scurr, Chairman of DINZ, thanked John Spiers and his family for an outstanding and long term contribution to the NZ deer industry in an impromptu moment that took John Spiers completely by surprise!

The HB Branch and DIFF Central Regions would also like to thank Firstlight, our major sponsor, for their large and very visible contribution to our project. Gerard Hickey and his company provide the Farmax programme and adviser Pete Swinburn as well as the wide range of venison based products that form the basis of the after-match function for our Field Days.



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Upcoming events

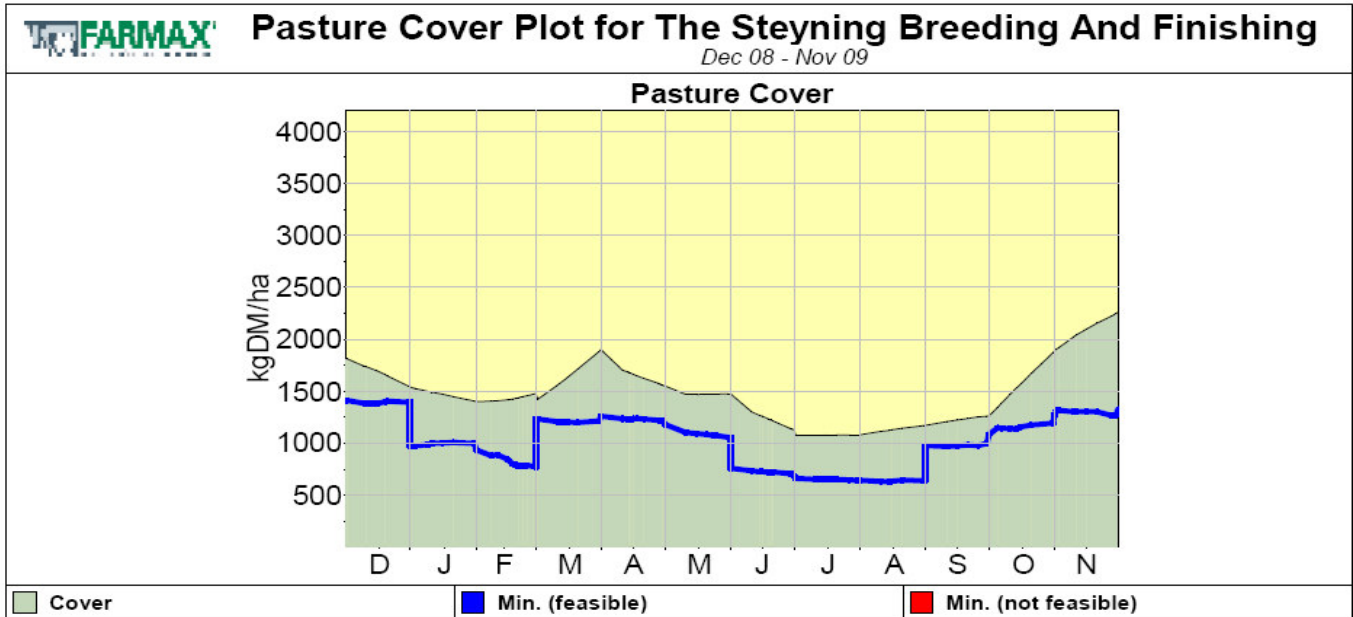
**HBDFA hosting
the NZDFA
Conference in
Napier
May 2010!**



What has been happening on The Steyning?

The big issue for most of the year has been the repeated dry. Lactation was a struggle for hinds everywhere. Good rain in late February created some sudden green feed but then the Bay went back to the dry with very low rainfalls in March, April and May and then lots of cold weather to boot

Actual pasture growth was just 42% of budget from November to March. Tim did fortnightly covers and then he and Pete Swinburn made their decisions based on these covers and their Farmax analysis. As a result, no trade lambs were purchased, bulls were sold early and supplements were fed out sooner than normal. See the full story in Pete's report on the DINZ website.



If you look closely at this graph you will see the fortnightly adjustments to the cover line from April onwards, along the top line over the green shaded bit that shows how much grass was on the farm. The sudden surge of grass growth from about 150 mm rain in February is also very obvious into March but then it all comes unstuck!

Note that the blue line represents the minimum required covers to feed the animals present. What Pete and Tim did not want to see was a heap of red lines on there- which happened on plenty of other HB properties. The decisions to sell (or not buy) mouths and to input supplements kept that minimum on the right side of the ledger by some careful management.

Looking to the right of the graph you can also see the next issue looming- what to do with all the spring grass. Watch this space.

One point that Pete Swinburn makes regularly is to plan for a normal season- normal rain and normal grass growth. It is plain to see that tools such as Farmax combined with some good advice will then give you the ability to handle the seasons that turn out to not be "normal".



It has been a busy time on the farm with stuff that wasn't drought-related too. Again, much of the detail is better viewed at the DINZ website.

Weaning weights were down for the MA hinds but up for the first fawners. The R2 hinds had great scanning in 2008 so there were no late fawns born. These hinds were grazing the rape/chicory crop in mid-lactation in a bid to also further improve weaning weights and were successfully run behind a three wire electric fence with fawns at foot from mid January.

Weaning was done 10-14 days ahead of schedule on 20 February due to the continuing dry- explaining at least some of the lowered weaning weights. This was so successful that Tim intends to make this a standard weaning date in future.



R2 hinds running in for scanning

About 150 hinds were AI'd with DIL semen for a 69% conception rate and the balance of the farm natural mated. Scanning showed a great result- nearly 100% conception in MA and R2 hinds alike. The MA hinds to the European red stags and to the Peel Forest B11 terminal sires were mainly mated in March with average mating dates of around 25-27 March.

The R2 hinds were mated in two groups- one to spikers and one to experienced two year stags. This time the result was even better than 2008- 97% pregnant and no lates to cull. The average mating date was 6 April and there was no difference between the two mating groups/methods.

Hind weights were well up, at least in part due to the early weaning. The MA hinds were up 3-9 kg on 2008 (average 122-126 for different mobs and ranging 113-140 kg) and the R2 hinds up 4 kg (average of 109 kg and range 99-119 kg). Condition scores were excellent at 4.0 average for the MA and 3.75 for the R2. Good deer with good breeding and in good condition. Perfect!

We have continued to follow up the johnes issues. About 60 blood test "positive" or "suspicious" hinds were allowed to fawn and were culled after weaning. Their weaners have been blood tested twice since then and will be followed through until they are also culled. We may not see much clinical johnes with these deer, despite their history, as the clinical issues seem to occur in the second winter in HB, by which time all these deer will have been culled.

The R2 hinds and spikers were tested in winter too and a similar proportion of positives were culled as 2008. As the entire breeding herd was tested in 2008, we look forward to testing the R2 hinds in 2010- there should be some progress to see by then. It is not a quick fix!

We also tested about 80 R2 Friesian bulls that represented three source herds, with assistance from DRL. Somewhat surprisingly, there were no positive animals amongst them. That was good news though.



Growth rates of weaners have been excellent- see the website for all the pretty graphs too.

The stated DIFF aim is for 250 grams/day autumn growth and given that autumn is usually totally unreliable in the Bay, an effort was made to come up with a plan to push along the growth rates in a proportion of the weaners. This ultimately meant getting the system right for a mob to be grazing chicory all autumn.

That February rain meant that the early post-wean growth of deer was pretty good on many local farms. Red (DIL AI bred as well as European natural mated) weaners on The Steyning did achieve 250 g/d on the chicory and their wapiti-cross counter parts did 190 g/d. The reds on grass also did about 190 g/d which is good considering that more “normal” results for the Bay would be nearer 100-120 g/d.

Do not read too much into the Red versus Wapiti result just yet please. Comparing the best European red stags in the country with three of the few available wapiti-type commercial animals in the North Island was never going to be a level playing field and we do need to wait until the winter and spring growth rate data is in hand. The wapiti did wean as well or better than the reds though, especially good considering that there were some later born calves in there and they would also have been born later as a group due to the longer gestation period for the crossbreed.

This exercise of comparing terminal sires with European reds will be continued next year with the Peel Forest B11 stags mating about 80 hinds this year.

A full Faecal Egg Count reduction test was done using the tail end weaners. The FECRT involves allowing gut and lungworm counts to build up then sampling animals individually and dosing to their exact weight with appropriate anthelmintics. This showed very good results with BZ oral drenches as well as the two Abamectin drenches used. What we did see was only about an 80% kill of gut worms though.

This is an issue that the deer industry needs to tackle head on and if we look at the sheep and beef industry approach to the issue of drench resistance we see that our industry is seriously dragging the chain! We intend to expand on this topic at the DIFF Field Day that will be run in conjunction with the NZDFA Conference next May- we will bring you the news from the sheep world and apply some common sense to the issue of drench resistance in deer. We plan to get you armed with some practical ways to minimize the development of this potentially massive problem on your farm!

