



ON-FARM/ PRODUCTIVITY

PRODUCER MANAGER'S REPORT

Provision of contracted and additional services to the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association (NZDFA) at national, branch and local level continued with the appointment of Hannah Hsu in the Marketing and Communications Assistant (MCA) role, following Natalie Fraser's move to full-time university study. Hannah brings additional skills in translation and communication for Mandarin-speaking countries that will assist the velvet marketing programme. Around 60% of the MCA's duties are directed towards servicing NZDFA and producer interests, as well as supporting the Producer Manager's role.

Communications, apart from *Deer Industry News*, centred around producing newsletters, advertising events and reporting on the *Making the Difference* Focus Farm Project. The monthly production of the electronic newsletter *Stagline-Online* is an exclusive service to subscription-paying NZDFA

members. *Stagline-Online* is now well into its third year. (NZDFA members wishing to receive the newsletter should contact Hannah Hsu at: hannah.hsu@deernz.org)

The Deer Industry New Zealand and NZDFA relationship is defined within a formal service agreement and the range of topics and issues addressed remains typically varied throughout the year.

Deer Industry New Zealand funded producer working groups or producer support include:

- The Tb Free New Zealand Working Group, which had a major role in association with the NZDFA Executive Committee in submissions, largely supporting the proposed National Pest Management Strategy. Separate submissions were made by [Deer Industry New Zealand](#) and [NZDFA](#).
- Representation on the [Venison Supply Systems](#)

- panel associated with DEEResearch
- AHB Representatives Committee attended by NZDFA member, Ponty von Dadelszen
- NZDFA viewpoint on [NAIT](#)
- Productivity Strategy
- DEERSelect and genetic progress especially in venison estimated breeding values (EBV).

In addition, the Producer Manager is closely associated with John's Management Ltd (JML), the John's Research Group 2 (JRG2), and [Sustainable Farming Fund](#) projects. Dr Jaimie Hunnam from JML joined [JRG2](#) as the Technical Project manager to assist working toward achieving the milestones around this important piece of work.

DEERSelect published sire stag venison growth trait EBVs for Eastern, Composites and English sires from over 400 stags. These are systematically ranked, objectively recorded and analysed for growth traits. The DEERSelect [website](#)

also features a sortable function for growth rate EBVs.

The NZDFA Executive Committee met regularly throughout the year with Deer Industry New Zealand Executives who report in detail on their activities. This offers a strong boost to communication and feedback to the NZDFA for Branches' information.

The October 2008 Branch Chairmen's meetings with the Deer Industry New Zealand Board and Executive again developed further into a full afternoon and evening session, with a formal structure involving the Board in reporting and Q&A sessions.

The format for the two-day event this year was to extend the market reports with a series of key speakers on wide-ranging topics including:

- the likely impact of the 2009 Government

version of the Emissions Trading Scheme, (Dr Brent Layton, NZIER)

- the Pastoral Genomics Consortium
- the development of new cisgenic drought-resistant grasses, high production clovers and other grass cultivars
- updates from John's Management Ltd and Landcorp Farming.

The meeting also hosted the President and CEO of Federated Farmers. This remains a unique opportunity for NZDFA leaders to engage with Deer Industry New Zealand Board members and the Executive and is an annual highlight.

Deer Industry New Zealand remains committed to encouraging an active Producer Manager role at the branch level, made more effective through association with the Focus Farms project. Better timetabling and planning with linked Branch activities would make the travel and time spent more cost effective and is an area under review.

Conference 2009: Passion and Profit

The Central Regions Branch hosted the [May 2009 conference](#) in Palmerston North. It exceeded early expectations. Themed *Passion and Profit*, the conference succeeded on the back of strong

venison prices continuing well into the frozen season, and farmer confidence in strong industry returns and prospects.

The conference opened with an agribusiness seminar, featuring a quality presentation from Rabobank giving an international perspective on the world financial crisis and the position of New Zealand agriculture and the deer industry. Landcorp Farming's CEO, Chris Kelly positively assessed the future of venison production for the industry, and Landcorp's position. This key session discussed traceability from the perspectives of processors and technology suppliers and the application of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID). The agribusiness seminar proved very popular and will be maintained and refined as a key feature of future conferences ahead of the formal general meeting (FGM) and NZDFA annual general meeting sessions.

The welcome function featured Deer Industry New Zealand Executive Chef, Graham Brown, who led a talented local chef team in preparing and demonstrating a five-course degustation menu, with video link from the kitchen. By using the leg cuts, they showed the versatility with which farm-raised venison can be used in restaurants.

Deer Industry New Zealand's FGM featured in-depth market reports and perspectives from four venison processors. The FGM has become a conference





highlight with its series of executive reports and opportunity for vigorous Q&A. The conference venue was dominated by a spectacular antler wall curated by the Central Regions Branch. It featured most of the greatest red, elk and fallow heads grown recently on New Zealand farms, manifesting the passion for antler genetics and the trophy aspects of the business.

The conference, with its emphasis on traceability, also gave a mandate to the NZDFA Executive Committee to charge a working group to develop practical, cost-effective criteria for deer farmers to support NAIT, when introduced.

NAIT

The deer industry was represented by the Deer Industry New Zealand CEO on the National Animal Identification and Tracing (NAIT) Governance Group, and also through the Producer Manager on the Technical Advisory Group, with a Deer Industry New Zealand and NZDFA view expressed. The year saw a considerable shift in deer farmers' earlier concerns and opposition based around perceived added cost for marginal benefit, with an agreement with NAIT that:

- the deer industry would join the scheme twelve months following its mandatory approval for the dairy and beef industries (expected to be 2010)
- that the RFID tagging of weaners be completed

by six months of age, rather than the three months originally suggested as a practical aid to many deer farm management systems

- that there be a three-year transition time to tag capital stock, but accepting that any capital stock leaving the property for sale or slaughter would be fully NAIT compliant and RFID tagged.

The deer industry is also keen to pursue a cheaper direct-to-slaughter RFID tag option with interested manufacturers and has been investigating ultra high frequency and RFID tag technology.

ON-FARM PRODUCTIVITY IMPROVEMENT AND PROFITABILITY

Making the DIFFerence, the Deer Industry Focus Farms Project

The 2008/09 year marked further refinement and gathering momentum around this important technology transfer initiative. Strong attendances, ranging from 45 to 160 participants, continued to feature across the three or four field days per regional project. These events attract solid regional interest and are well established alongside associated New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association Branch activities. Public rural media continued to strongly support the project and have featured all properties in-depth, alongside deer industry reports in *Deer Industry News* and *The Deer Farmer*.

While each farm and region has its own priorities, some common themes emerged as key parts of the “*more deer, heavier and earlier*” goal. These included:

- the use of summer and autumn brassicas and specialist pastures to enhance lactation and weaner growth pre-winter
- greater awareness of growth rate Estimated Breeding Values
- terminal sires in breeding programmes
- diagnosis, test and cull programmes around Johne's disease.

In addition there was steady interest in electronic identification and its associated management

applications as the industry began to accept the inevitable transition to the National Animal Identification and Tracing (NAIT) programme. The Focus Farms were an effective way to demonstrate this technology.

A key feature of the project was the annual Focus Farm Conference, bringing together focus farming couples, facilitators and community group chairmen, venison supply systems researchers and Deer Industry New Zealand executives and Board Members.

This Deer Industry New Zealand-funded review of the year also allowed direct feedback and development of new areas and approaches to technology transfer, measuring and encouraging uptake. This year's conference identified the need for a theme leading each field day and a concentration on short, sharp, simple take-home messages – practical and relevant to the theme and season.

Deer Industry New Zealand also recognised that there is a vast amount of information that has already been developed over previous years, with projects like DEER Master and the Richmond/Wrightson deer performance project of the early 2000s. Relevant aspects of this basic knowledge will be featured at Focus Farm field days, as the newer faces and next generation of deer farmers and skilled staff emerges.

There will be more emphasis on determining uptake and on-farm application. Feedback from attendees will be sought, with more community involvement in themes and programme planning and with greater emphasis on reducing operational costs and improving profitability.

Funding is always under pressure, as the project scope and time commitment increases. Deer Industry New Zealand is acutely aware of the huge voluntary contribution made to these projects and thanks are extended those involved for this exceptional effort. A tangible expression of that enthusiasm was realised when the combined South Canterbury and Canterbury late winter field day hosted the Minister of Agriculture, Hon. David Carter as a featured guest, covering a wide range of regional and national issues, and a frank Q&A session in a packed Dunsandel Community Hall.

All four established Focus Farms are mid-way through their three (or possibly four) year programme and continued to make progress towards their objectives. This was led by solid increases in conception and weaning rates and in growth and carcass performance.

Disappointingly this year, no further projects associated with the farms were approved for funding under the Ministry of Agriculture's Sustainable Farming Fund, although there was strong interest at regional level in areas such

as the evaluation of genetic performance and suitability of different breed and strain types in tough hill country. Some within-project work will continue, nonetheless.

Late in the year, a new initiative for the large catchment of deer farmers in South Otago, Southland and Fiordland (about 950 deer farms) was launched in a joint venture between Deer Industry New Zealand, the local New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association Branches and Landcorp Farming Ltd. There is additional support from the local Meat and Wool New Zealand Monitor Farm Programme. This new Focus Farm will concentrate on “Integration”, recognising that most deer farms also run beef and sheep. The concept mixes demonstration of innovative management and technology systems across breeding, finishing and stud stock programmes, run by Landcorp in the Fiordland area with two Southland deer farmers' specialist finishing and breeding finishing units. A self-funding discussion group will be run in tandem with a three-year field day programme, similar to DEER South. There will be an in-depth review of the management and drivers around productivity, efficiency and profitability.

ANIMAL HEALTH

Johne's disease

Johne's disease has been estimated by Johne's Management Limited (JML) to cost the industry about \$12 million each year. Deer Industry New Zealand continued to invest in management of this significant animal health issue through JML and the Johne's Disease Research Consortium (JDRC).

JML

Established two years ago, JML provides management services to farmers in addition to the information feedback on carcass status of Johne's disease. Highlights in 2008/09 included:

- production of a technical manual, *Understanding Johne's disease*, for veterinarians
- development of a network of 30 specialist consultants on Johne's disease (including three training workshops and support software)
- ongoing assistance from plant inspectors to determine and detect enlarged lymph nodes indicative of Johne's disease
- presentations at Focus Farm events and field days and regular coverage in *Deer Industry News*.

JDRC

The consortium has now been running for one year, although research programmes have been set up in previous years and brought into the consortium. The first annual report is available at www.jdrc.co.nz

Highlights of particular relevance to deer included:

- Preliminary survey results across livestock species reported that 18–35% of deer farmers, 18–21% of dairy farmers, 5–14% of sheep farmers and 2–4% of beef farmers have suspected or confirmed clinical Johne's disease on their farms.
- A three-year age-susceptibility study of deer to Johne's disease (originally started and funded by DEEResearch) was completed and proved that weaners were more likely to be shedding the causative bacteria and show clinical signs than older animals.

Leptospirosis

Communication plan

Leptospirosis is one of the most common diseases transmitted from animals to humans. A Deer Industry New Zealand-facilitated working group developed an industry communications plan for leptospirosis, which was released in July 2008.

The first major communication was the release of an information brochure and wallet card (to show to doctors if leptospirosis is suspected). Deer Industry New Zealand was also provided a number of copies of a booklet produced by the Meat Industry Association, *Common illnesses in the meat industry*, which is provided to all new deer farmers or upon request.

Further independent research on impacts on deer productivity and responses to vaccination is being conducted by Massey University; results were presented at the annual conference of the New Zealand Veterinary Association's Deer Branch and in industry publications.

A framework for identifying communication gaps and key steps required to create greater awareness of risk factors and management of the disease will be developed in 2009/10 and key industry groups that can assist will be approached.

