

# Deer Industry News

Sustainable development model at Queenstown



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# Deer Industry News

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NEW ZEALAND AND THE NEW ZEALAND  
DEER FARMERS' ASSOCIATION

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**Cover:** Queenstown Park Station manager Adam Hill. See page 4 for feature on this new development that is combining deer farming with tourism activities and strong environmental values.

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**EDITOR** Phil Stewart, Words & Pictures  
**LAYOUT** Rory Stewart

# A path to reducing agriculture emissions



Nicola Shadbolt.

Everyone has a role to play in the transition to low emissions, and many deer farmers in Aotearoa have already shown a willingness to develop and adapt to reduce emissions on farm.

**THE DEER INDUSTRY** is doing good work to transition to low-emissions practices, even in the face of adversities like low venison prices and dealing with the impact of Covid-19.

Continuing to share ideas and experiences through groups like Advance Parties and the Deer Industry Environment Awards will help further that progress. It's been encouraging to see industry bodies, particularly Deer Industry New Zealand, leading the way and putting things in place to support each other.

We know that farmers have been actively taking steps to determine what their emissions look like. Knowing your emissions profile will be important ahead of what's coming up in 2022. He Waka Eke Noa – a Government/industry partnership – has been developing proposals around an alternative system for pricing agricultural emissions, outside the NZ ETS.

The partnership will be consulting with farmers about the options being considered throughout this process, and will report to Government on their proposals in April 2022. A pricing mechanism designed with and for farmers should be workable and connect to ways in which they, and the deer industry, can respond.

The Commission's role – as set out in legislation – is to assess whether farmers will be ready to participate in a farm-level emissions pricing system, or if more work needs to be done. This involves looking at the industry's progress towards measuring agricultural emissions at the farm level, and farm-plans to manage emissions. We will report on this to the Minister of Climate Change by 30 June 2022.

The Commission is also required to advise the Ministers of Climate Change and Agriculture on what assistance – if any – should be provided to farmers who participate in a farm-level emissions pricing scheme. We'll be providing this advice by 30 April 2022.

There are issues we need to consider in giving that advice, including technology, social circumstances, the distribution of impacts, and the Crown–Māori relationship.

This work all leads to the Government making a decision on agricultural emissions pricing by 31 December 2022. Either it will outline an alternative system for pricing emissions on farm, or it will decide that agricultural emissions should be priced at a processor level in the NZ ETS from 2025 – or earlier.

We are clear in our advice released earlier this year, *Ināia tonu nei*, that emissions pricing is important, but it is only one part of the response in reducing agricultural emissions. The Government will need to progress work on other policies that support emissions reductions on farm. We expect to see evidence of this in May 2022, when the Government's final Emissions Reduction Plan (ERP) is due to be released.

We know you need a clear and consistent way forward, and more certainty on what the future will look like for the industry. The deer industry is already preparing its farmers to contribute towards emissions reductions in Aotearoa. We need to build on that momentum quickly so we can reach the 2030 methane reduction target without major disruptions. ■

– Professor Nicola Shadbolt, Commissioner, Climate Change Commission

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# Wild thyme, visitors and deer

This low-input, high-output deer farm will be part of a much bigger picture, writes **Trevor Walton**.

**THE MAIN ROAD** into Queenstown from the north snakes along the bluffs of the Kawarau Gorge from Cromwell, one of the main arteries through New Zealand's Otago goldfield history, past river flats and terraces which were once stripped of their cover and ripped apart in the search for wealth.

Today the lure of gold has been replaced by the lure of the landscape: the stunning lakes, vineyards, tussock lands, mountains and rivers of the region. It attracts retirees setting up home in Queenstown, Wanaka and Cromwell – and when Covid allows, visitors by the planeload. In winter, it's skiers and snowboarders. In the warmer months, cyclists explore an ever-expanding web of trails across Central Otago.

One of these trails passes along the north side of the Kawarau Gorge where, in late spring and summer, the steeper faces are mauve with flowering wild thyme, along with gold flowers of that old enemy, gorse.

If after passing the AJ Hackett bungy jump on the way into Queenstown, the cyclists lift their eyes to view the other side of the Kawarau River, they will see Chard Farm vineyard. Further on they will see deer. In late spring they'll see stags in velvet and younger animals on the green intensively farmed flats and – if their eyesight is good – they'll see hinds on the mountain slopes amid pasture, tussock, matagouri, sweet briar and thyme.

What they are viewing is Queenstown Park Station, a formerly down-at-heel property purchased seven years ago by the Porter brothers, whose vision is to transform it into a tourist, agricultural and environmental showcase.

Driving the deer farm transformation are three men from wildly diverse backgrounds: an Auckland- and Queenstown-based entrepreneur, a former professional rugby player and a retired civil engineer.

The entrepreneur is pioneer deer farmer Alastair Porter who, together with his brothers John and Neville, form the Porter Holdings partnership, former owners of Remarkables Park Deer Stud and now the owners of Queenstown Park Station. The former rugby professional is Adam Hill, a born and bred deer enthusiast who is now the station manager. The civil engineer is Graeme Bates, who long ago helped build the Clyde Dam. These days he's the station's full-time fencer, blasting post holes into the Otago schist and erecting fences on some very gnarly country indeed.

Behind the scenes there's another team, led by Alastair Porter. They're planning a tourist and urban gondola and village, cycle and walking trails, a glamping area in the high tussocks, an organic garden, vineyards and large areas of native revegetation.

"We're working with the council for the rezoning of the property, to achieve economic land-use through a balance of tourist resort, agriculture, native regeneration and conservation. A property like this is ideally situated for this. It is not economic as a stand-alone farm," says Porter.

## Deer farm first

The deer farm has been the first cab off the rank in the development of the property. Next is native bush regeneration. Last season the landscape team gathered seeds from mountain beech, kowhai and other native plants growing on the property and nearby. Shortly a shade house and plant nursery will be set up, with the aim of growing 150,000 trees, mainly beech.

"We'll be planting beech on the terrace escarpments along the river flats. Long ago, much of the farm would have been beech forest so we are working to return beech and other native species to our conservation areas," explains Porter.



Hinds grazing in autumn at Queenstown Park Station, with the Kawarau River in the background. Photo: Neville Porter



Queenstown Park Station farm manager Adam Hill with one of his favourite places as a backdrop. The gnarly country on the station is well suited to deer.

It will make for an increasingly beautiful place to farm deer. And the deer are Adam Hill's main focus.

He was raised in Southland, where his father farmed deer for venison and velvet – initially in the Waikaka Valley and later in Te Anau. After leaving Otago Boys' High, Hill shepherded in Te Anau and then at Waipori Station near Lawrence where, as a weekend rugby player, he was shoulder-tapped to play professionally.

After four seasons playing for Otago, a brief stint in Hong Kong and three seasons with the Hurricanes, it was time to move back to the land. Both he and his partner Rosie were keen to live in the south, but it needed to be in a place where he could work as a farm manager and where her career – she's a resource management lawyer – could also prosper.

"I'd always had an exit plan to go farming once my rugby career was over. So when I wasn't playing I studied farming by correspondence and then through the Primary ITO," Hill says.

"It was the end of the rugby season five years ago and Alastair was advertising a manager's job on a high country property he was developing 10 minutes from Queenstown. It couldn't have been better. Alastair is committed to investing in the farm and looks after us very well. Rosie's career is going gangbusters."

Queenstown Park Station stretches for 14km along the north-facing side (south bank) of the Kawarau River. Eight hundred of its 2,000 hectares are now deer fenced – 300ha of flats and terraces and 500ha of rolling to seriously steep hill.

The balance, apart from areas that are too steep for grazing, runs merinos and beef cattle. In due course all the farmed area will be deer fenced and the balance will be regenerating native vegetation, the resort, organic farm and vineyards. The area devoted to each has yet to be confirmed in terms of rezoning.

Like most farm developments, big blocks on the station are being deer fenced and then subdivided into smaller paddocks to enable better pasture and stock management.

But at that point, Porter and Hill depart from the standard recipe. Their ambition is not to achieve the traditional target of

farm development – maximum productivity from the land. Instead they are wanting to create a sustainable system where inputs are low and where per-animal productivity is high; where water quality is high and soil loss is low.

The station's continental climate makes this a challenge. The winters last 120 days and droughts can last 60 days or longer. Yet the aim is to minimise the amount of supplementary feed – including barley – they buy in.

"We're boom or bust with grass. When it's growing we make as much baleage as we can," Hill says.

Seven years ago, when the Porters bought the property, only 50ha was deer fenced. Since then, close to 20km of deer fence has been erected, largely by Bates. More is being added each year. Also an irrigation system has been installed, covering 50ha of the flats.

Thanks to subdivision and pasture improvement, deer numbers and income are increasing year by year. Currently the herd is made up of 600 breeding hinds, 300 velvet stags, 250 spikers, 250 yearling hinds and 100 elite hinds. The base stock come from Porter's former Remarkables Park Deer Stud which was best known for its body weights – with 2 yr-olds up to 266 kg – and trophy genetics.

On a north-facing summer-dry property like this there's a clear need to maximise the number of young deer that can be sold off the farm in spring, when chilled venison prices are high and before drought sets in. But until three seasons ago, this objective was thwarted by the station's breeding programme. None of the farm's rising yearlings went for slaughter before Christmas.



Former civil engineer and now farm fencer Graeme Bates chews the fat with Adam Hill. The Landrover is Bates' pride and joy. The post-driver creates the wrong impression – most of the 20km of fencing on the station has been done by hand.

*continued on page 6*

Queenstown Park: continued

## Separating velvet and venison priorities

“We were trying to breed everything into the one animal – venison, velvet and trophy – but progress was slow. We weren’t doing any of the traits justice. We were compromising head size for body size and vice-versa,” Hill says.

“So we split the hinds into two mobs – 70 per cent venison, 30 per cent velvet and trophy. It sounds more complicated, but it’s made my life much easier. It means we are not waiting until January to measure the pedicles on all the spikers. Venison animals are off the farm as soon as they hit 110kg liveweight.”

The venison mob is being turbo-charged by high growth rate eastern red sires bought in from Melior, formerly Deer Improvement, where Porter was a founding director. Nothing less than a 30+ breeding value makes the cut. Already there’s been a 5–10kg leap in weaning weights and this year 15 percent of the yearlings went for slaughter during the chilled season. In three years, Hill expects this will increase to 25 percent plus.

On the velvet front, with a smaller number of animals to select from, the station is once again investing in DNA testing. This enables them to continue to make steady genetic progress while breeding their own velvet and trophy replacements.

Each year 20–30 mature stags are grown out as hard antler on Queenstown Park Station’s high country. The stags are sold to Alps Outfitters, a trophy hunting business owned by Hill and his business partner, former Hurricanes team-mate Ben May. This arrangement works well. Porter gets a good price for his 9-year old velvet stags and Alps has assured access to some mighty fine heads.

This focus on increasing the productivity of the deer is matched by an equal – or possibly greater – focus on farming within environmental and social constraints.

At present the bike trail on the north bank of the Kawarau overlooks the property. Porter envisages a new cycle trail running along their side of the river as well. This – along with visitors to the proposed resort – will bring more people closer to the station.

“There’s often a big difference between what the public sees and the reality. So we need to be able to justify everything we do here, including how something might appear to someone who knows very little about deer or farming,” says Hill.

## More sustainable practices

Porter and Hill say they are trying to stay ahead of the curve environmentally. They believe that farming is not just for the here and now. It can be integrated with managing the long-term health of the land. It’s also something that visitors to the resort are likely to believe is important.

“In addition to revegetation, as a further contribution to combatting global warming I am considering taking cattle off the farm. They are big methane emitters and there’s nothing much you can do to reduce their emissions on a property like this, short of cutting numbers,” says Porter.

The Porters are also considering setting up a commercial worm farm on the property that would take food waste from the proposed Queenstown Park resort and hospitality outlets at Remarkables Park. This would provide worm-post for the proposed organic farm and further build the station’s environmental credentials.

As a member of the Passion2Profit Central Otago Environmental Advance Party, Hill says he can benchmark what he is doing on the station with what other farmers are doing. “I’m especially interested in new wintering techniques and learning from deer farmers exploring regenerative farming systems,” he says. (See article on page 16 for more on regenerative agriculture.)

In seven years, the farm team have largely eliminated wilding pines and gorse. Cattle have been fenced out of the Kawarau River and other major waterways. Remaining environmental issues on the hills include scrub weeds like old man’s beard and sweet briar, as well as further pest management.

Fertiliser use is being minimised on the hills, with a fine particle mix of calcium phosphate, sulphur, lime flour and trace elements sprayed on by helicopter at low rates once every two years. This reduces the risk of run-off and ensures the nutrients are rapidly taken up by plants. Sub- and red-clover seed that has been inoculated with rhizobia is also included in the mix.

## Salt making a difference

Interestingly, on the advice of Murray Cockburn of Mainland Minerals, common salt is now included in the mix. The salt is not a plant nutrient, but it makes over-mature grasses more palatable to stock.

Regardless of how it works, Hill has seen a big difference in deer grazing behaviour since they first started applying the salt.

“Previously the deer tended to graze in a band across the middle of the hillsides, largely leaving the tops alone. After three years they are now grazing the whole block, ensuring a good spread of dung and urine. It has effectively doubled our grazing area.

“On a property like this, deer have a real place. Deer also graze on noxious species, helping with weed and fire control. Yet for most of the year you would hardly know they were there,” Hill says.

“Merinos and cattle help control the vegetation the deer don’t eat, but sweet briar typically needs spraying by helicopter. We’d prefer not to be doing that, so we have been trialling Boer goats for weed control, running them at 1 per hectare.

“The goats have made an amazing difference. They don’t really compete with the hinds, but you can see the benefits in blocks that have goats versus those that don’t. We started with 150 and are retaining the female kids. The spare males are sent to slaughter.”

On the flats the main challenge is the lack of soil structure – a major flood in 1999 buried an extensive area in a metre of silt. It’s naturally fertile, but needs to be grazed with care or the deer will cut it up. To make the area more resilient and for added drought resistance, Hill has been experimenting with pasture mixes and has settled on ones based on deep-rooted species – legumes like lucerne, herbs like chicory and plantain – as well as vigorous grasses. Tall fescue seems to be the best option.

The fertiliser programme on the flats area has been conventional – with nutrients being added to replace those used to grow venison and velvet – but Hill and Alastair are working on other options including regenerative farming.

A small area – perhaps 10 ha – has been ploughed each year and sown in rape for grazing by weaners in autumn, but the aim is to minimise the cropped area.

“Farming in NZ, in our view, must increasingly adapt and

continued on page 8

MELIOR HIGH GROWTH RATE RED DEER

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# GHG number – one year to go

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

It's now just 12 months until all New Zealand farmers will be expected to know their net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The following year (2023), a pilot accounting system for reporting is meant to be in place and by 2025 all farmers will have to have a written plan for measuring and managing emissions. (See also editorial on page 3.)

**BUT THE PRESSURE** is already on. The He Waka Eke Noa (HWEN) partnership, which includes DINZ, has also set a milestone for the end of 2021 that 25 percent of all farmers know their annual total on-farm greenhouse gas emissions and have a written plan in place to measure and manage these.

DINZ is working hard towards this goal, with facilitators around the country doing their best to find dates within hectic schedules. DINZ is also initiating plans for more workshops in February to get the ball rolling next year throughout the regions.

HWEN has evaluated various tools for estimating emissions, including Farmax, OverseerFM and the Ministry for the Environment's spreadsheet. Using Farmax and Overseer for this task attracts a fee but MfE's basic and fairly unsophisticated spreadsheet is free.

Also free is a fourth tool, Beef + Lamb NZ's GHG calculator, which was launched in July.

The Beef + Lamb calculator had input from farmers and processors and development was funded through the Red Meat Profit Partnership.

It starts with a simple emissions number calculation based

on area and stock numbers. The calculator covers sheep, beef and deer, but not dairy or cropping. Input of further summary information on stock purchases, sales and grazing, fertiliser use (available from fertiliser companies) and woody vegetation cover gives users a more complete picture.

Using the calculator requires an online account on the Beef + Lamb NZ website. There's a guide and videos to support users. Beef + Lamb NZ says the information entered is secure and no individual information is shared without permission. The organisation is planning to benchmark data, so farmers can compare their GHG numbers with those of a similar class and region.

The cut-off for inclusion in the HWEN targets is any enterprise bigger than 80 hectares, any dairy herd with a supply number, or any feedlot. Beef + Lamb NZ says this would capture about 97 percent of GHG emissions and 25,000 farms.

- Further information:

<https://beeflambnz.com/ghg-calculator-info#access> ■

## Queenstown Park: continued

innovate to meet the challenges of global warming, diminishing biodiversity, and degradation of landscapes. At Queenstown Park we are keen to play a strong part in addressing these challenges, including providing opportunities for visitors to enjoy and learn more about enhancing the environment," says Porter.

## A quality development model

For Porter, Queenstown Park follows his success with North and South Island properties, where he has earned a reputation for creating quality developments. Here he will draw on this reputation, his love of the environment and four decades of passion for deer to create a resort that draws visitors nationally and from around the globe showcasing managed and outstanding natural landscapes. His resort models include Aspen and Whistler in North America.

For Hill, it's all about sustainable deer management. Across the Kawarau, he has a small block where he's running a trophy fallow herd. Here, he and Rosie are building a home for themselves and their two young children, Lockie and Goldie.

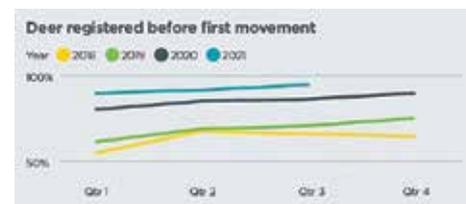
Doubtless it will be a great place to escape to. Even for someone who has played sport in packed stadiums, there are times when it's nice to be out of the public eye, doing your own thing with your family. ■

## DEER FACTS

### TB-freedom is not far away

Thanks to the efforts of farmers and others, we are getting much closer to eradicating TB from our deer and cattle. Keep up the good work:

- Comply with the rules of the TBfree programme
- Tag all cattle and deer with NAIT-approved ear tags
- Register them in the NAIT system within 180 days of birth or before they move off the farm for the first time - whichever comes first
- Record all off-farm movements of stock on the NAIT database within 48 hours of the movement



Source: OSPRI

Read the updated 'Tuberculosis' *Deer Fact* enclosed in this issue of *Deer Industry News*. Then file it, after discarding your existing copy, in the deer health section of your *Deer Fact* ring binder.



*Deer Facts* are produced by DINZ as part of the P2P strategy – a joint venture between DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries.

# Europe cautiously optimistic on venison prospects

by Richard Rennie, *Deer Industry News* contributing writer

Despite rising Covid cases, optimism in venison's traditional winter European markets is on the rise after a tough season last year that saw sales to foodservice businesses collapse with lockdowns and surging infection numbers.

**SHANNON CAMPBELL WORKS** as a chef in Germany on behalf of DINZ and appreciates more than most the impact last year's continual lockdowns and restrictions had on New Zealand venison producers. A resident of Berlin, he was pivotal in helping marketing efforts move from traditional restaurant-focused promotions and training to promotions and online support for in-home venison sales.

A year on he is starting to witness growing confidence in the foodservice sector, albeit with some caution as importers and operators eye burgeoning infection levels among the unvaccinated populations of most European countries.

"It is really an unspoken deal now, that if you are vaccinated, you will be granted the freedoms you largely enjoyed before the pandemic. That includes being able to dine out."

Through October and November, Shannon has been working with importers to undertake promotional activities for both foodservice and retail.

"We did a demonstration with Alliance's partner Prime Meat at a Akzenta (a gourmet supermarket) and I ended up doing 300 portions in an hour, when I may have normally expected about 50 – it was a huge surge in interest." The interest is now being supported with more investment by Prime Meat, which is advertising in top food magazines.

He suspects the market has witnessed something of a clean-out of older frozen product in recent months, clearing the decks for new stock input.

Alliance sales manager Terry O'Connell confirmed sales levels were significantly up on last year, but there was a level of nervousness within the market, particularly Germany, on grounds that infection rates have elevated in recent weeks.

"But foodservice demand has definitely picked up from last year. Issues with sea freight delivery are there, but air freight has been helping to supplement shortages. However, there are now also issues with air freight delivery; Emirates has withdrawn a South Island service."

He said the recent strong sell through of older frozen stock was giving exporters some confidence Europe was through the worst of its pandemic lockdown crises.

Alliance was continuing with its work with Hello Fresh on the continent and in the United Kingdom, which has proven valuable in helping build consumer confidence around cooking venison products.

Post winter, Alliance intends to continue with its barbecue promotional support to help grow out-of-season demand, particularly in Belgium.

"We are not going to give up on it; we have been at it for six years and it takes time to get change in consumers' perceptions."

A recent trip to Sweden by Shannon revealed a society almost back to pre-Covid life, with a distinct absence of masks and social distancing.

For the first time in almost two years, he conducted a workshop with local chefs, using Mountain River venison.

The company has recently also been taken on with Martin and Severa, a large food supply company sourcing product for large commercial and government-based food outlets including hospitals.

"We visited them and were the first commercial group they had hosted in two years."

Mountain River has enjoyed a long-standing relationship with Scandinavia, with campaigns funded in part by DINZ.

A different flavour profile to traditional European venison is backed by strong supplier relationships which have also pivoted to a retail focus after Covid struck.

That effort has extended to partnering with large retail chain Ica and demonstrating dishes including venison tartare and tender strip steaks to customers.

Other profile work has included working with renowned Swedish chef Magnus Nilsson, cooking New Zealand venison in his iconic Kings Garden restaurant.

"He put a lot of effort into using Mountain River venison on the menu and it does much to help raise the profile of it here." ■



A Mountain River instore display in a Swedish supermarket.

# Domestic retail takes a step up

by Richard Rennie, *Deer Industry News* contributing writer

Venison marketing manager Nick Taylor says DINZ will be undertaking more activity in the New Zealand market in the coming year with to lift local understanding of how to cook venison, and the variety of cuts now available.

**“ALL THE COMPANIES** now have retail venison products in the market, either in supermarkets or through online shops.”

DINZ is also working with other New Zealand food brands to highlight the versatility and tastiness of home-cooked venison dishes.

“The move will help lower the total cost of promotions for both parties, and also help leverage more coverage through publications, most recently to include recipes in *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*.”

Other publications will include widely circulated *NZ Herald Canvas* magazine and *Viva*.

The collaborative effort will run initially for six months and include two videos and recipes each month, running on social media. The recipes will also be shared on [www.fresh.co.nz](http://www.fresh.co.nz).

“We are finding social media, particularly Facebook, is proving a very cost-effective way to engage with our audience.”

Work is also being done with DINZ executive chef Graham Brown, identifying more opportunities for him to work with the foodservice sector, particularly restaurants, to improve venison knowledge and use of it.

James Petrie is the owner of Merchant of Venison, which supplies venison to foodservice, supermarkets and direct to consumers. He’s enthusiastic about the time spent with Brown educating chefs and culinary students about options with venison cuts, and ways to best prepare and cook it. Merchant of Venison sources product through Rakaia-based Mountain River Venison.

“The restaurant trade in Auckland has been hard hit and our hearts go out to them. But we have been able to work around a number of restaurants elsewhere and have been surprised at some of the cuts and cooking methods chefs are coming up with.”

He cited Christchurch barbecue restaurant Smokey Ts, a “low and slow” barbecue outlet headed by Tristin Anderson. Petrie said as a restaurant selling up to 750kg of meat a day, the opportunity to have venison trialled as a non-traditional meat cooked this way was appealing.

“I had my doubts about how well venison short-ribs might go,

but it turned out they were sensational. They also tried bone-in venison briskets, cooked for about four hours; they were equally superb.”

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**“I had my doubts about how well venison short-ribs might go, but it turned out they were sensational.”**

Petrie said the opportunity to match his network of chefs with Graham Brown’s knowledge has proven a good combination, with chef road trips proving to be a fun and valuable experience.

“Working with Graham, I have been learning a lot more about the applications of different cuts. It’s changed my perception of what can be done with the product.”

A good ice-breaker when visiting chefs is to cut open a pack of Petrie’s red berry tea smoked venison.

“It is something quite different, with a great smell and taste. They love it.”

A portion of the work with chefs is committed to convincing them about the value of converting from wild-sourced venison to farmed.

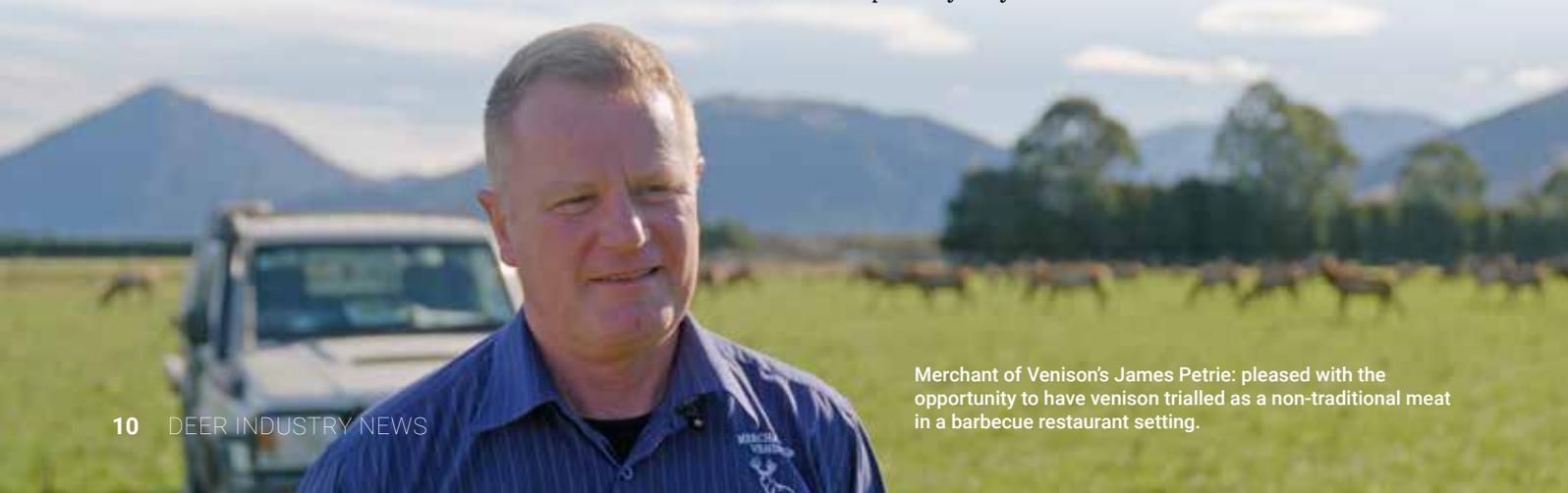
“We had one chef cook up a farmed venison rump and compare that with a wild loin. They soon appreciated the better flavour and texture.”

The pair have also been working to highlight the wide variety of cuts and products that can be sourced from venison, rather than simply the traditional Denver leg.

“We can show them we now have cheeks, tongue, offal. It is all about changing their perceptions of what they think venison is.”

He also welcomed the NZ Venison BBQ day initiative, which was held in August.

“To be honest I wondered how it would go here at that time of year, but it was a great idea, and with a little more time to work on it I think it will be even bigger next year. It does a lot to highlight how venison is a quality eating experience, very lean and exceptionally tasty.” ■



Merchant of Venison’s James Petrie: pleased with the opportunity to have venison trialled as a non-traditional meat in a barbecue restaurant setting.

# The 100kg weaner back on radar

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Just imagine if you could get a good chunk of your finishers off to processing in May, before the first frosts of their first winter. No winter crop, mud or runoff worries. No fretting about daily weight gains over the cold months. No drench costs in the leadup to the traditional spring chilled season. Hinds in better condition. And potential for new high-value markets for tender farm-raised venison at a time when top-quality product is in short supply.



This pen of R1 stags from the trial were pre-rut weaned and received supplement. The mean liveweight by 25 May of stags in this group was 83.5kg. All but one of this pen had started forming pedicles. Individual weights and pedicle lengths (where measurable) are shown.

**IT'S NOT A** new idea. The “100kg weaner by 1 June” concept was being heavily promoted about 15 years ago but never really caught on. Perhaps it was ahead of its time. The idea was promoted by Black Forest Park in their 2005 sale catalogue, revealing that a small group of weaners raised in commercial conditions on their farm were already hitting that symbolic magic mark, thanks in large part to their exceptional (for the time) Eastern sire, Kabul.

The Black Forest team predicted that with continuing genetic improvement, April–June finishing would be realised in the near future. Well they were right about the rapid genetic improvement since then, but “near future” has stretched out a bit.

The latest Deer Select summary for European and composite sires has a couple already nudging past the +40kg mark for weight at 12 months (W12), and another 40 sires in the +30–40kg range.

Kabul, whose W12 eBV was about +14kg, would be well back in the pack now, so the genetic potential in today's deer herd should get more animals over that 100kg line. But would you have to stuff them with expensive supplements to get there? And would it only work with progeny of the highest BV animals?

A recently concluded trial at AgResearch Invermay set out to find whether it's possible to get red stag rising yearlings to killable size by 1 June and results are promising.

The trial was funded courtesy of the Invermay team winning AgResearch's internal Science Impact Prize for their work on the Deer Progeny Test. The award made an additional \$200,000

available to spend on deer-related work (see *Deer Industry News* August/September 2020).

AgResearch Invermay deer scientist Jamie Ward said the disruptions caused by Covid last year left them with access to a decent-sized cohort of 2020-born fawns from red hinds (W12 average +10kg) and red sires (W12 average +16.8kg). These were quite modest breeding values for growth, making the trial very relatable to typical commercial farming conditions.

## Two key variables

Because they had good numbers to play with – 220 hind/fawn pairs – the research design allowed them to explore the impacts of two key variables (nutrition and weaning) in different combinations:

### Nutrition:

- The “standard” Invermay pasture-only system; or
- Pasture plus a supplement pellet (13.5 MJME/kgDM + 18% crude protein) making up 20 percent of daily energy requirements.

### Weaning:

- Early (pre-rut, early March, 100 days of age); or
- Late (post-rut, end of May, 190 days of age)

Each of these variables could serve as either a brake (pre-rut weaning, pasture-only) or accelerator (post-rut weaning, addition of supplement) in the race to get stag fawns across the 100kg line.

The influence of these factors was clear in the results. Among the stags with the most favourable treatment (post-rut weaning, addition of the supplement), 77 percent had reached a killable size by the end of the trial on 25 May (45kg carcass). For a 50kg carcass the figure falls to 44 percent of the male weaners being ready.

Ward says the costs involved in terms of supplement and the effects on hinds of post-rut weaning also need to be taken into account, but the trial showed that in realistic farming conditions it was possible to get a good draft of males away before winter, something that helped reduce production costs. The pasture on the Invermay farm was affected by dry conditions towards the end of the trial in May, a further brake on growth rates that added another touch of realism for the trial.

## “Little balls of muscle”

The occasional criticism that young animals are all skin and bone without the carcass development to make them good candidates for slaughter was debunked by this trial, Ward says. “These were little balls of muscle – their condition was astounding.”

*continued on page 12*

*100kg weaner: continued*

He says that using higher-BV dams and sires than they used at Invermay, or indeed terminal sires, it should be even easier to get more male progeny to killable weights before winter.

“We used very typical sires for this trial, so these results should be easy to attain elsewhere.”

Looking at the implications for farm systems, Ward said meeting pre-winter slaughter targets did increase the feed requirements through summer and autumn, something not usually achievable with pasture only. Pre-rut weaning takes some of the pressure off feed requirements, especially in a dry autumn.

Ward noted that use of supplements before the 3-month stage made very little difference (between 0.8–1.6kg) to liveweights between the pasture-only and supplemented groups. The growth rate benefits from using supplement seemed to kick in between 3 and 6 months of age, so it might be more cost effective to hold off introducing supplement until the 3-month stage if growing weaners through to pre-winter finishing weights.

He said all of the males in the trial had been slaughtered by July, while the females are being retained as replacements.

At the time of writing Ward was still awaiting some statistical work to be completed to validate the results but it's likely the study will be published.

“The numbers are being run through Farmax so we will also find out the greenhouse gas emissions implications from changing to a pre-winter finishing system.” ■



AgResearch research associate Charlie Bennett cutting lactation period pastures in a supplemented mob on 14 January.

## Velvet season off to strong start

by Richard Rennie, *Deer Industry News* contributing writer

Deer velvet prices have returned to a pre-Covid high, with values strengthening 10–15 percent on last year and continuing positive signals coming from traditional markets.

“**EARLY OFFERS WERE** initially 5–10 percent up on last year, and they have quickly moved on further, with prices now firm on where we were two years ago,” says DINZ manager, markets Rhys Griffiths. “Underlying demand for velvet remains strong, compared with last year, when Covid prompted greater uncertainty.”

This year, ongoing concerns over shipping and supply logistics have also prompted importers to secure more stock in advance to ensure they have enough inventory for the year ahead.

A key concern for suppliers here has been continuity of operations at the Chinese port of Dalian, currently closed due to a Covid outbreak. Supply is particularly vulnerable to Dalian closures, as it is the main import point in China for most frozen food products, and the sole port designated to handle deer velvet.

“We applaud China’s continued strict management of Covid; however the logistics risk will remain while the eradication policy stays in place as it is.”

Another logistics concern facing all New Zealand fresh and frozen exporters is the availability of refrigerated or frozen containers here in New Zealand for the busy seasonal export trade.

A global imbalance in containers means it is a struggle to procure enough here, while freight rates also remain high and shipping space tight.

Griffiths advises farmers to communicate regularly with their velvet buyer on intentions to sell, ensuring they have a clear indication of when and how much velvet they will be offloading. When Dalian Port reopens, exporters will be keen to secure shipping space as quickly as possible.



NZ Trade Commissioner to Korea, Stephen Blair (middle front) was a special guest at the festival.

With South Korea continuing with its Covid suppression policy, port closures aren’t such a risk. Furthermore, consumer demand remains strong for a product viewed as an immunity booster in pandemic times.

New Zealand velvet has also recently enjoyed a boost to its profile within the traditional medicine market of South Korea.

After a two-year hiatus due to last year’s outbreak, the South Korean Oriental medicine sector returned to celebrate its annual Bojwon ceremony in early November.

The deeply cultural event is based around a charity providing traditional Oriental medicines to the poor.

“It signifies how well regarded New Zealand is that our trade commissioner was asked to play a leading role in the ceremony on

*continued on page 14*



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# Data stream: Hill and high country water quality study

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

If there's one word that sums up what they're finding in the hill and high country water quality research programme so far, it's "dynamic". And that's dynamic in the classical sense – that water courses and landscapes in these environments are in a constant state of change.

**THE FIVE-YEAR PROGRAMME** of data collection from 10 deer properties throughout New Zealand is now past the half-way point and preliminary analysis will start to appear from late 2022. Bryan Thompson, research associate at AgResearch Invermay, is coordinating the field work and analysis.

He explains the programme started in 2017 with five hill and high country properties. A further five have been added since then, so the completion of field work and analysis will be staggered somewhat. It started under the former DEEResearch structure but has been transferred to the new AgResearch–DINZ innovation framework as part of the Environment group of projects.

Five years is a decent stretch of time for data collection and this is where "dynamic" comes into it. Thompson says that although they avoid taking water samples after heavy rain events, the streams, wetlands and wallows they visit can change remarkably quickly over time. This can be for the good – for example vegetation in a heavily grazed wetland can bounce back quickly once rested from deer. Or it can go the other way, with streambank erosion cropping up without warning (spoiler: it's not always caused by animals).



Streambank erosion is not always caused by livestock.

Most importantly, taking readings over time smooths out some of these bumps and reveals a clearer picture of what's happening with water quality in these environments over a longer timeframe.

*Velvet report: continued*

our behalf, and was the first foreigner to do so," says Griffiths.

Interest in velvet from health food companies, and as an additive to other food products is also growing in South Korea.

Many reported exceptionally strong sales over the Korean Thanksgiving held in late September, a time when families participate in gift giving, often involving high-end products and

## Project aims

- Collect longitudinal water quality data on the impact of deer in hill and high country farming systems and to provide scientific evidence to support alternative solutions for protecting the environment on behalf of the New Zealand deer industry.
- Develop a simple visual scoring tool related to water quality data to help identify critical source areas for possible future targeted mitigations.

## What's being measured

Water samples are taken monthly, which is a big commitment from researchers and farmers over such an extended period. Because the samples have to be at the labs within 24 hours there are logistical challenges too. They're taken on each farm from the bottom of each catchment, near where the water will leave the farm. Additional water samples are taken within each catchment to get a better understanding of the flow of contaminants across the catchment.

The water quality measures are fairly standard, and aligned to regional council methods. There's a good reason for that: if the deer industry bumps up against a council on landuse/water quality issues, then the data used to support the industry's case needs to be in the scientific language the councils use. So what is measured?

- *E. coli*
- Nitrogen (N)
- Phosphorus
- Suspended solids.

The N measure takes in monitoring of ammoniacal N (source: animals), triple-N (nitrites and nitrates, source: fertiliser and some indirectly from animals) and total N.

Thompson says going to this level gives a much clearer picture of where the N is coming from and aligns with regional council methods. He says that by subtracting the triple-N and ammoniacal N from the total measured N, they are left with a figure for the dissolved organic nitrogen – the main sources of this are soil

food types. "Luxury packs of velvet gifts are highly prized."

Griffiths welcomes the growing interest from health food producers in New Zealand velvet as an ingredient, helping bring the New Zealand industry closer to consumers prepared to invest in high-value health products. ■

organic matter and decaying plants.

The phosphorus (P) monitoring includes dissolved reactive phosphorus (the fraction available to plants and algae) and total phosphorus.

The research team has introduced some other measures of stream health during the programme too. They've adapted NIWA's stream health monitoring assessment kit (SHMAK) test, which assesses water quality, stream life and stream habitat.

## Methodology for measuring stream life

They're also using a rapidly developing and exciting technology, eDNA testing, to get a reading on different forms of stream life. The technology covers plant and animal life but they're focusing on the animal kingdom for now. Thompson's excited about the technique, which can provide a quick and reliable reading on the relative abundance of different forms of stream life. The reason it's exciting is that it greatly extends their reach, providing a reading for just \$155 per sample that would otherwise have needed impractically long hours of observation work.

"This will be a game changer," he says. "I'm also recommending farmers starting to use the technology so they can get a better ongoing reading on their stream health."

## Scoring matrix

In addition to the routine monthly water sampling, the team maps and grades the catchments every 6 months using a simple 5-point scoring matrix recording amounts of damage to stream banks (from "no damage" to "catastrophic") and evidence of animal presence (from "no evidence" to "high presence"). Features such as streams, wallows, wetlands, animal crossings, vegetation and bank collapses are mapped using GPS coordinates.

This simple scoring matrix will be one of the outputs of the research that will



Mapping features using GPS coordinates.

empower farmers to assess the state of waterways on their own properties over time.

Although the work is being carried out on 10 farms covering a range of landscapes and farm systems, Thompson is cautious about extrapolating what they find too broadly. "The picture for the industry will depend on how representative these farms are," he says. That said, he expects they'll be able to get some high-level recommendations and some do's and don'ts for farming deer in these types of environments.

## Patience needed on conclusions

He's also reluctant to start drawing any conclusions from what they've measured so far. "We want a full data set first."

He will allow, though, that they've been struck by the very dynamic nature of the catchments they're observing. "Streams can just disappear." They've also noticed that visible features such as hoof marks and grazed vegetation change quickly when deer haven't been in the area for a while. Rushes, tussocks and woody vegetation like coprosmas all get attention from browsing deer, but when left alone they've recovered quickly, indicating the vegetation cover can be robust.

They've also notice some expected regional differences. For example the drier regions are higher in phosphorus due to more sediment getting into waterways and North Island catchments are generally higher in N, probably due to higher stocking densities.

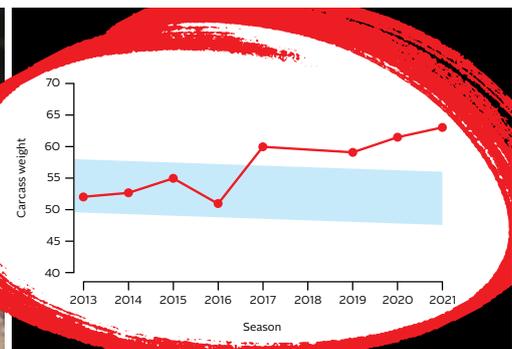
Another observation has been that tree-filled gullies, while they look nice from a distance, are no good for water quality if they're open to deer to use as stock camps. Any understorey gets eaten and sediment/phosphorus and N get dumped into waterways.

Thompson said they will be rolling out a widespread communications plan once the analysis of the 5 years of data starts to take shape, starting in about a year's time. ■



Wetland areas can bounce back quite quickly from the impacts of browsing and hooves.

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DPO12

# Regenerative agriculture: What's the buzz?

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The term regenerative agriculture (RA) has been cropping up a lot more often in recent times. It's got some people excited and others steaming mad. But in the words of *Calm the Farm's* Mike Taitoko<sup>1</sup>, "regenerative farming globally is a freight train that has left the station – and is only going one way".

**SO WHAT EXACTLY** is RA? Is it just a fad or does it have a solid foundation in science? Does it offer anything to New Zealand deer farmers, or are we already doing everything it advocates? And what's being done so far with RA in New Zealand? Are our venison exporters on board with it?

In this, the first of a series of three articles on RA, we look at definitions for regenerative agriculture and the strong response from some in the scientific community to its promotion.

## Defining RA: the White Paper

Regenerative agriculture is a bit of a will-o'-the-wisp – hard to pin down. It's often conflated with organic farming and although there is overlap, they're not necessarily the same thing. For example, it doesn't outright ban synthetic fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides, although it certainly reduces their use.

RA is not as prescriptive as some organic standards and it doesn't yet have certification systems established in New Zealand to accredit producers using its methods (although that may be changing, as we'll discover later in this series).

Also, it hasn't been around that long. The RA movement started in the United States in the 1980s in response to the environmental damage being caused by US intensive "industrial" farming methods, including soil loss and degradation. It's since taken hold in Australia and is now getting traction in New Zealand and other countries.



Regenerative agriculture evolved in response to "industrial" farming methods in the United States.

<sup>1</sup> [www.calmthefarm.nz](http://www.calmthefarm.nz)  
<sup>2</sup> <https://bit.ly/3BoNUpt>

## Certification overseas

The NGO Savory Institute, which is dedicated to the restoration of the world's degraded grasslands, promotes holistic management using RA principles to improve productivity, biodiversity, and economic and social wellbeing. Some of its work on grazing management started in Zimbabwe. It has established Ecological Outcome Verification™, a land health outcome-based protocol to connect producers and consumers.

In the United States, the Regenerative Organic Alliance was set up in 2017 and has established Regenerative Organic Certified™. The standard is based on soil health, animal welfare and "social fairness".

According to the February 2021 White Paper<sup>2</sup> *Regenerative agriculture in Aotearoa New Zealand – research pathways to build science-based evidence and national narratives*, RA "denotes a range of farming systems aiming to reverse the harm caused by intensive agriculture and continuously improve the farm system". The term "sustainable agriculture" is also sometimes used – incidentally that expression was being bandied around by the former MAF back in the 1990s.

There's no clear definition for RA and it focuses more on outcomes than on methods for getting there. It takes a holistic approach, integrating concepts of wellness across people, animals,

the natural world and farm systems. In the New Zealand context there's a nice fit with te ao Māori and customary knowledge. Indeed there's already a UNESCO-funded Te Tai Tokerau climate change action project underway near Whangarei involving RA principles: "Utilising mātauranga Māori and Western science to protect and restore the soil on farms in Tai Tokerau".

While all this might



The white paper on RA spelled out areas where research is needed.

sound a bit woolly to some, there are some guiding principles and practices used for RA, noted in the above White Paper. A lot of these wouldn't sound out of place at an Advance Party meeting. They are, in summary:

### Principles

- The farm is a complex and evolving living system
- Adapt your decisions to suit the context
- Question your beliefs and test different ideas
- Connect and learn with like-minded peers
- Failures are part of the journey
- Use an open and flexible toolbox – keeping practices up your sleeve for when they're needed
- Use clear goals, monitoring and planning
- Maximise photosynthesis using a big green leaf area to feed soil microbes and improve soil health
- Minimise soil disturbance from cultivation, chemicals, soluble fertiliser or livestock compaction
- Harness diversity
- Manage livestock strategically to build soil biological function and fertility.

### Practices employed in RA systems

- Diverse cover crops (arable systems), forage crops and perennial pastures
- "Bale grazing" balancing hay with fresh pasture; intentional hay wastage giving a fertiliser effect
- No-till sowing and retention of crop residues
- Integrated pest management including use of predator insects to control pests

- Minimising synthetic fertiliser inputs, e.g. using foliar application
- Minimising chemical inputs, e.g. herbicides, drenches, and using biological substitutes where possible
- "Buffering" synthetic and chemical inputs using carbon-based products such as humate-derived substances to chelate fertiliser and chemicals
- Use of inoculants, biostimulants and carbon-rich inputs to enhance the function of soil, plant and animal microbiomes, e.g. seaweed derivatives
- Mineral balancing and trace elements
- Timing interventions using the lunar calendar
- Grazing management.

### Pushback from scientists

While some of the practices and principles of regenerative agriculture are fairly widely used in conventional New Zealand farm systems – direct drilling and rotational grazing for example – some are less mainstream.

A number of high-profile New Zealand scientists have unleashed a sustained attack on RA over the past couple of years. They've been supported in part by our fellow rural publication, *Countrywide*, which has taken a strong editorial stance against RA.

A common complaint has been that adopting RA is by definition a repudiation of conventional farming methods, seen as labelling them "degenerative". Another criticism is that RA was developed in a very different environment to that of New Zealand, where we already use a lot of RA practices such as rotational grazing and where our soil health (microorganisms, sequestered carbon) is already good.

*continued on page 18*



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*Regen agriculture: continued*

Minimising soil disturbance is one of the tenets of RA.

Writing in *Countrywide* in December 2019, Jacqueline Rowarth argued that using artificial nitrogen (N) saved legumes from having to fix N and allowed them to put more energy into producing leafy growth for stock. She added that RA is probably less efficient than conventional methods, so would generate more greenhouse gases per unit of production.

In the same publication in November 2020, independent soil scientist Doug Edmeades labelled RA as pseudo-science. He said our existing suite of soil tests already measure biological activity in soils and these have proven that “NZ soils are in good heart”. RA claims about fertiliser were “outrageous”, he said.

In the same issue of *Countrywide*, Lincoln University’s Leo Condon also refuted RA claims that fertilisers can damage soil microorganisms – on the contrary they enhanced soil biology, he said. Applications of bacterial or fungal “biostimulants” would likely have little effect.

Condon also argued, as did others, that you cannot keep removing soil nutrients via plants and animals and expect not to have to replace them with something.

A special issue of the NZ Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Science (NZIAHS) magazine *AgScience* featured RA in December 2020<sup>3</sup>. It carried a series of articles from 14 authors, most piling on to RA practices. Among the many complaints about RA were that diverse pasture species could present a biosecurity threat, that biodiversity was already being promoted through fenced-off riparian strips and retired land, and that soil microorganisms can’t conjure up plant nutrients indefinitely.

NZIAHS president John Hickford, who coordinated the publication, concluded that there is probably a place for RA in New Zealand at a conceptual level, but that “if it is accepted as a defined system, then that system must be auditable, with clear evidence provided of benefit”.

The heat was turned up considerably in February 2021 with the publication of the aforementioned White Paper, *Regenerative agriculture in Aotearoa New Zealand*. The project was funded by the Our Land and Water National Science Challenge, the NEXT Foundation and Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research.

Many of the writers in the earlier NZIAHS publication again took to *Countrywide* in April 2021 to condemn the White Paper, labelling it, among other things as “chequebook politics”, designed to attract funding and fit a government narrative. Landcare declined the invitation to respond to these criticisms. Instead it filed a complaint with the Media Council that the magazine’s coverage misrepresented the research in a damaging way and was unfair. The council upheld the complaint.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.agscience.org.nz/agscience-magazine/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://nzfarmlife.co.nz/engage-but-ground-the-practice-in-science/>

- This stoush does no-one any favours, least of all the farming industry. New Zealand’s science community is small, gets by on limited resources and can ill afford such polarising debate. It’s to be hoped that all parties can turn their attention to the science and focus on the priority areas of research that have been identified. Ed.



Jacqueline Rowarth and Doug Edmeades are both strong critics of RA.

## It’s not all negative

Not everyone has written off RA. Writing to *Countrywide* in the heat of the debate, independent soil scientist Graham Shepherd defended the RA White Paper as good research – not perfect but a start. He said that of the three branches of soil science – chemical, physical and biological – there had been an over emphasis on the chemical side and not enough on soil biology. “Alternative” practices were often shouted down with demands to “show me the science”. Shepherd said anecdotal evidence from farmers was often unfairly dismissed. Farmers were excellent observers of what worked and what didn’t at farm level.

A discussion with DairyNZ scientists on RA by the magazine *Dairy Exporter*<sup>4</sup> revealed a more nuanced approach. Bruce Thorrold, strategy and investment leader at DairyNZ told the magazine that the vision of RA had close parallels with the dairy sector’s holistic vision, as well as MPI’s Te Taiao strategy.

The key was to ensure that certain RA practices were grounded in science and economics, as well as in farmer experience. Thorrold told *Dairy Exporter* that it was true that soil fungi could help make minerals like phosphorus available to plants, that couldn’t go on indefinitely. That wasn’t a reason to throw out the whole concept, he added.

DairyNZ principal scientist Ina Pinxterhuis, in the same article, said some of the RA principles and practices identified in the RA White Paper were compatible with profitable and sustainable best practice, but others weren’t and needed more research. Among these was the RA practice of leaving long pasture residuals, which could result in lower feed quality and higher risk from facial eczema. She said scientists needed to give farmers meaningful measures so they can see what works while avoiding the downsides.

- In the second article in this series we’ll look at some of the high-profile farms implementing RA practices, and the organisations supporting them. We’ve also asked the five venison marketing companies if they see any opportunities for venison grown using RA. ■

# Farm data to build picture of performance

Wayne and Jacqui Anderson hope a new national project building knowledge of farm systems and performance will provide them with valuable data to improve their Hawke's Bay deer farm.

**THE EXPERIENCED FARM** owners diversified into deer in March 2020, buying a 71-hectare (effective) property at Maraekakaho, west of Hastings.

The gently rolling farm runs 107 mixed-age hinds, replacement hinds, 114 fawns and several breeding stags.

"We bought the farm as a going concern in the middle of a one-in-100-year drought. A lack of rain, coupled with dire venison prices, has meant 18 months of extremely poor returns," Jacqui Anderson said.

The Andersons strive to grow livestock as efficiently as possible, maximising profits while reducing their environmental footprint.

"It would be useful to know how we measure up against other deer farms in the region and nationally," she said.

"I want to know if our economic and environmental performance could be better. That sort of detailed sector data doesn't currently exist."

That's why the Andersons are one of up to 200 deer farmers taking part in a ground-breaking project funded by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI).

The four-year project will bring together detailed physical/production, environmental and financial data from up to 2,500 farms across five sectors for the first time.

It aims to provide a snapshot of farm performance across the dairy, beef and lamb, deer, arable and horticulture sectors.

"The significance of this project cannot be underestimated. It is the first time such robust data has been collected and analysed," said Matthew Newman, who's leading the project for MPI.

"Having quality farm data will enable better decision-making by farmers and growers, industry organisations and policy makers."

MPI is partnering with sector groups such as DINZ to collate and analyse the anonymised farm data.

Participating deer farmers will all receive a free Farm Environment Plan (FEP), valued at about \$5,000.

"The benefits of having a Farm Environment Plan are multi-pronged. They help farmers identify risks within their business and areas for environmental improvement, including reducing agricultural greenhouse gas emissions," Newman said.

"We have already collected data from 20 deer farms," said DINZ farm performance manager Phil McKenzie. "We aim to do a further 70 this year. We've never gathered this amount of farm-level data from so many deer farms across New Zealand at the same time. [The initiative is known within the deer industry as the Natural Knowledge Project, see *Deer Industry News* June/July 2021, page 27.]

"This is an opportunity to show the environmental gains deer farmers have been quietly making. They have made more progress

than they are often given credit for."

Developing a set of robust baseline cross-sector data will help achieve productivity and sustainability targets in the Government's *Fit for a Better World* roadmap. This first phase of the farm monitoring programme is expected to be completed by June 2023. ■

• **Article supplied.**



Jacqui Anderson: Keen to see how they measure up against other deer farms.



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# Tony Pearce: Team man, through and through



Last month marked the retirement of DINZ producer manager Tony Pearce, something the deer industry, and Tony himself, might take a while to get used to. *Deer Industry News* Editor **Phil Stewart** sat down with Tony recently for a chat about his time in the industry and in DINZ.

**TONY'S DEPARTURE FROM** the role is significant for a couple of reasons. First, he's the "last man standing" from the original complement of staff when DINZ was formed just over 19 years ago. Second – and far more importantly – he's become one of the most knowledgeable, respected and well-liked personalities of the modern deer industry, both within New Zealand and internationally. He's going to be missed.

## A circuitous journey

If things had turned out differently, Tony may well have ended up working not with deer but at a museum or university scrutinising rocks and fossils. His first degree was a BSc in geology and zoology, with a strong interest in palaeontology. His thesis was on the Maerewhenua diggings in North Otago and he'd intended to go on and do a PhD in geology, but fate took him elsewhere.

He "wandered into the wool science building" at Lincoln and found himself pursuing a Dip Ag Sci and then a masters on the wool of the Tukidale, a Romney-based variant like the Drysdale thought to have great potential at the time thanks to its hairy, fast-growing fleece and suitability for carpet fibre. In the face of competition from the Drysdale and CarpetMaster breeds from Massey, the Tukidale, with its related production of large horns in both ewes and rams and particular style of wool, never caught on and it survives only in Australia as a rare breed.

Tony in the meantime got involved in farming in North Otago before moving to his long-standing and current home patch of Saddle Hill, near Mosgiel. Here he and wife Julie ran town supply dairy cows and sheep for a period in partnership with Julie's father. Cows have long since been replaced by deer since the opportunity



Helping out with some AI work at Invermay.

to develop and manage an investors' syndicate based on deer started the deer industry journey in 1979.

He'd met and worked with some great people at Lincoln, an early sign of his knack for making connections and networks which

has served him so well in his DINZ role. But then in 1983 a job at the MAF (now AgResearch) Invermay research centre "popped up". It was in this new role as an animal technician with Ken Drew and the Invermay deer research team, including managing Invermay's large deer research farm, where his lifelong love of deer and the industry became incurable. Tony credits then-director Jock Allison for his support and appreciation of his combination of science background and practical farming skills.

There followed a very happy and productive 19 years at Invermay, during which time Tony did much to create enduring links between New Zealand deer farming and overseas deer interests. This included an astonishingly diverse experience with Sir Tim Wallis and the Alpine deer group in North America and wherever Tim's enthusiasm and vision also focused.<sup>1</sup>

By the late 1990s Tony was well entrenched in the industry through farming, his MAF (later AgResearch) job at Invermay and through governance roles. Initially this was through the Otago DFA and then he was elected to the former NZDFA Council.

I first met Tony at the 25th anniversary "Silver to Gold" conference at Queenstown in 2000, when he patiently explained to me the intricacies of using Père David deer hybrids as genetic research tools. At the same conference – the last of the big and lavish affairs – Tony was named as joint winner of the prestigious Deer Industry Award, along with John Spiers and Andrew Duncan. This man already had a track record.

## Making the change

Just two years later, in 2002, he accepted the role of producer manager at the newly created Deer Industry New Zealand. So why did he leave a happy and secure job with AgResearch for a completely different role in a new organisation based hundreds of kilometres away? "MJ [Loza] just asked me if I'd like to apply!"

It was actually a natural fit with what he'd been doing and Tony was keen to take on the challenge. He said the former Game Industry Board had been moving closer to producers and this process accelerated with the formation of DINZ and his own role. Tony credits people such as Clive Jermy, John Scurr (chair of the pre-reform DFA and later DINZ chair), and chief executives like MJ Loza and Collier Isaacs for their early support. Tony has valued the support and working relationships with CEOs and the Boards and the DINZ team as a critical part of the producer management role. Their enthusiasm, vision and appreciation for getting producer interests well represented further along the value chain and at industry governance level has stood the test of time, he said.

The DFA council's involvement in shaping the producer

<sup>1</sup> We don't have space to document this phase in detail here, but if you make the wise decision to buy a copy of *In Hindsight* by Lynda Gray, Tony's early career is well covered there. Order from [inhindsightnz@gmail.com](mailto:inhindsightnz@gmail.com)

manager role was also vital.

“The industry was in a really good space at the time. Velvet and venison were both looking great and there was a lot of optimism on the back of the Queenstown conference. Initiatives like the biennial industry environmental awards, initially promoted by Sir Peter Elworthy at Queenstown, really got people excited and were in place at Masterton the following year.”

Tony shared that excitement and didn't hesitate to accept the job. One of the requirements was a high level of contact between DINZ and the DFA branches, something that Tony has worked on tirelessly over the two decades.

It's also the great teamwork and culture that's evolved over the years within DINZ that's made Tony happy to stick around. He said a lot of the institutional memory from the Game Industry Board and DFA in its former shape was carried into DINZ. “If you didn't know something, there was always someone to ask.”

DINZ/DFA teamwork led to a long association with great friend and colleague John Tacon, and the first Deer Code of Welfare. At that time, and championed by John Paterson, the writing of the first Landcare manual, the environment awards and early conferences were also great examples of that team culture working, he said.

The role was flexible enough to adapt to changes in DFA practices – for example there used to be separate North and South Island branch chairs' meetings, and “days of remits”. Tony's meticulous eye for detail has served successive DFA Executive Committees well over the years. He's always helped ensure a high standard of record keeping and that constitutional processes

are followed to the letter. In turn he praises the way the Executive Committee and Selection and Appointments Panel have executed their responsibilities and taken the roles so seriously. “The leadership have always been selfless and generous with their time.”

There have always been plenty of gnarly issues to deal with for producers. While Tb had been an ongoing challenge for farmers right from the start, John's disease arrived with a hiss and a roar, decimating some herds in the early 2000s. Again it was about collaboration. Tony says the advocacy of farmers like Eddie Brock, Lloyd Thayer and Peter Aitken got things started. The knowledge and power arrived through the veterinary “royalty” of Noel Beatson, Peter Wilson and



Amateur auctioneering at the 25th anniversary conference at Queenstown in 2000, where two Southland swedes from Bill Taylor made over \$1000 each.

*continued on page 22*



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Tony Pearse: continued

Colin Mackintosh, with Adrian Campbell and Mandy Bell, and the diagnostics guru in Otago's deer lab, Frank Griffin. The final result of cooperation between scientists, vets, farmers and processors – Johne's Management Ltd, then DeerPRO – was another example of a great industry culture at work, Tony says. As a result of that teamwork, Johne's is now a relatively minor animal health issue for deer but well served through DeerPRO.

The teamwork and collaboration theme also extends to other organisations such as Beef + Lamb NZ, the NZVA Deer Branch, MPI, MFAT and other government departments. "Our close association with Beef + Lamb especially has really added value," he said.

Conferences also manifest the great connectedness that's developed and are really a microcosm of the deer industry, he said. Tony has directly helped organise 20 years' worth and been involved in a further six. They've changed a bit since he was first involved. For example the DFA annual meeting is now a much crisper and shorter affair than it was. A lot of the discussion and business has been devolved to branch and regional level and the heated politics of the early days have cooled somewhat. "The model for conferences will keep changing, which is healthy, but they should always be fun!"



Pictured here at the post-conference field day at Mount Burke Station, Wanaka, in 2012, Tony was rarely without his trusty camera. Among his many talents he's a fine photographer.

Tony is certainly a fan of some spontaneous fun himself. This was best exemplified at the Elk and Wapiti Society's 30th anniversary dinner where he added a touch of realism to an after dinner speech – an entertaining shaggy dog story involving a visit to a "gentlemen's club" on a trip to Canada – by stripping down to his speedos. It brought the house down.

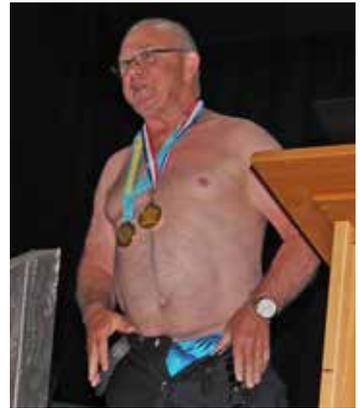
Fun and friendship aside, Tony's deeply proud of a string of initiatives the industry has achieved over the years, and typically modest about his own contribution. He cites the success of the Focus Farm programme at farms like Mendip Hills, Te Awamutu Station, Whiterock Station, Clayton Station, The Steyning and several others. Each one brought people and ideas together in new and innovative ways. He adds that the industry is small and flexible enough to adapt quickly to change and opportunity – Passion2Profit (P2P) is a prime example.

Tony said the cohesiveness of the industry has helped immensely with the success of P2P, and the culture that's grown means farmers have quickly responded to challenges from tougher environmental regulations, as well as the need to maintain scrupulous animal welfare standards. "Deer farmers acknowledge that compliance is a cost of doing business, but don't call it an undue burden. That's partly down to the skills of the DINZ people in those environmental and quality roles."

He's felt privileged to help judge the biennial deer farmers environmental awards, which "really bring out the talent in our industry". Co-writing the *Deer Industry Environmental Management Code of Practice* has also been a highlight and cemented a valuable association with the NZ Landcare Trust, MPI

and key regional councils with their expertise.

Another highlight has been his involvement with the DFA's Next Generation Programme, now running for nine years. Tony says succession in the deer industry was already starting to happen by the early 2000s when he joined DINZ, with sons and daughters of original deer farmers stepping up. This process needs ongoing encouragement though, so programmes like Next Generation, the succession planning workshops and even the P2P rural professionals and innovators workshops are essential to keep younger farmers and investors interested and engaged with deer, he said.



Getting down to his speedos to embellish his after-dinner speech at the 2017 Elk & Wapiti Society 30th anniversary dinner.

Tony's always enjoyed travel and has been on numerous trips overseas going right back to his days with "MAF International" when he visited Irian Jaya to help investigate the feasibility of a rusa deer farming venture. More recently he's enjoyed working with Rhys Griffiths in Korea and China, fostering links with Korean deer farmers and pharmaceutical companies, even helping judge velvet competitions there.

He's also felt privileged to be asked to judge velvet competitions in New Zealand, appreciating the enormous genetic gains he's seen over the years and the great teamwork among organisers, judges, sponsors and entrants. The awarding of life memberships for both the Elk & Wapiti Society and NZDFA have been highlights of his involvement in the industry.

So where to now for Tony Pearse? Like many contemplating retirement he's got personal goals, not least still running their deer farm and getting on with some development on the property. He's also keen to do more travel if and when restrictions ease and spend more time visiting their son Richard, daughter-in-law Susan and pet-mad 8-year-old grand daughter Lily.

He'll have an ongoing role with the four science Innovation Steering Groups, being engaged to help ensure producer



Explaining the finer points of judging at the Elk & Wapiti Society velvet competition in 2016.

# Financial sustainability – your choice

**IF YOU ALWAYS** do what you always did, you will always get what you always got. Decisions you make around the sire you purchase this sale season will influence your herd for at least 10 years and probably 15 years. The opportunity is now there to make science-based decisions which will drop dollars onto your bottom line.

A fundamental requirement is to know what the focus of your deer farming operation is and where you want to be in five or even 10 years. Know the traits that are important to reach those goals and look for a breeder who has made good progress in those traits.

Beware of raw data – velvet weight, body weight or eye muscle area. These are useful but the real power is in how much genetic merit for a trait a sire will pass onto his progeny. This is found in the eBV.

Single trait selection allows for rapid progress but history warns of the perils of this practice. Selection focused on milk production in dairy cows resulted in infertility issues and growth-focused selection in the pork industry came at the expense of meat quality. Our deer industry potentially runs the risk of falling into similar traps. Already some breeders are focused just on velvet or growth.

At Tikana we have adopted an all-round and balanced approach to traits we select for: velvet, meat, growth and health. The eBV for velvet is only within herd but is extremely useful to identify the velvet potential a hind/cow carries. All other traits are comparable across wapiti herds (next year they will be across all deer, red and wapiti). For venison producers the meat trait ceBVEMA (eye muscle area BV) is very powerful. A stag/bull with a high value for this trait leaves progeny with a higher meat to bone ratio, higher dressing out percentage and more tender venison. Currently the health trait is for parasite resistance. Progeny of stags/bulls with high eBVCARLA10 grow faster, cope better with worm challenge and create less parasite contamination on your farm. Strong selection pressure for this trait coupled with good management decisions will reduce the amount of drenching you need to do.

Across the board all of these traits will result in your deer having the potential to improve your bottom line. Make sure you purchase a sire whose genetic attributes will take you in the direction you want. ■

• Article supplied



- eBVs for Growth
- ceBVs for Venison  
(Carcass Yield and Venison Tenderness)
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Tony Pearse: continued



With wife Julie during a P2P “southern safari” tour with Hawke’s Bay Advance Party members in 2019.

perspectives are well represented as the groups consider priorities, directions and funding.

And what won’t he miss about the job? Not much, except “I probably won’t miss all those hours on the road or the tension that goes with organising a good conference each year.” The shortness of that list is a sign that he’s loved the work.

And there’s a fair bit he will miss: his “amazing” current producer management colleagues like Amy, Cenwynn and Rebecca as well as the wider team. “There’s a very strong, caring culture at DINZ, that’s been passed on over the years. We’ve had great leadership and supportive boards.”

Tony’s also going to miss his regular rounds of DFA branches and groups like the Elk & Wapiti Society – “I’ve loved working with them” – but has every intention of keeping in touch.

With typical Pearse humour, he sums up his leaving as “like being post-rut weaned”. I’m guessing he’ll be sticking around in the deer industry paddock for quite a bit longer.

Haere rā, Tony. And thanks. ■

- For a farewell note from Tony to the DFA and accolades from present and former DFA and DINZ chairs, see: [www.deernz.org/nzdfa/nzdfa-news/moving-on-in-conclusion-issue-172/](http://www.deernz.org/nzdfa/nzdfa-news/moving-on-in-conclusion-issue-172/)



Tony (centre) was presented with a beautiful Patu Onewa by his DINZ colleagues at a farewell dinner in Wellington last month. Onewa (greywacke) is traditionally used by Northern iwi for patu as they did not have easy access to pounamu. DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat said the patu is a gift from DINZ and the NZDFA. “It is given as a symbol of our respect for the leadership that Tony has given to us individually, and also for his people in the industry.” The patu was carved by Taranaki artist Keiron Toa from onewa collected in the area. The inscription read: “Thank you for your leadership, passion and knowledge.”

## Special message from a friend and colleague

Tony Pearse has been a constant presence in my life since we started the Deer Research Laboratory (DRL) at Otago in 1985, preceding his later move to DINZ. Even at his busiest, Tony would assume control in the abattoir as we embarked on the necropsy of experimental deer. His impish sense of humour and delight in the bizarre sustained DRL staff through long days dissecting lymph nodes from deer experimentally infected with TB or ParaTB. His influence must have been magical because for more than 15 years every experiment produced clearcut findings.



Through Tony we were invited to engage with the North American and Canadian deer industries when they experienced their first TB outbreaks. His confidence in the DRL diagnostic TB platform allowed us to provide services to Norb Berg and Scott Petty Jnr, two of North America’s finest citizens, who led the development of the American deer industry until it was paralysed by CWD. Honouring the faith we enjoyed from such fine people was evident only through Tony’s affirmation of our work.

To increase our scope Tony, Colin Mackintosh and I headed for South Africa to consume Amarula and mega brais, and postmortem infected 18-month 400kg buffalo. Again Tony acted as master of the abattoir to retrieve specimens. We planned to kill 16 buffalo a day for four days, but after two nights the remaining animals became so spooked they broke down the walls of the bouma and scarpered. After remarkable tracking by local staff they were recaptured 50km away. Two days later we completed the necropsies to find our vaccine showed no evidence of protection.

In the evenings we were constantly alerted to the peals of nearby honey badgers, which were keen to check our offal. One night as we relieved ourselves through the wire fence I asked Tony why he was so subdued. He retorted: “It’s OK for you, but honey badgers can jump up to 1 metre and castrate male buffalo. You may have greater elevation, but 1 metre is just my height!”

Throughout my career Tony has been directly involved in endorsements, references and testimonials which resulted in my being awarded several honours including the Pickering Medal for services to the deer industry. None of these would have been possible without the credibility Tony brought. I am forever in his debt for his sincerity and confidence which has been a beacon for DRL for more than 30 years.

Wishing you more time to avoid those fractures that came from too many animal husbandry catchups on Saddle Hill, Tony!

Fondest wishes, Frank Griffin ■

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# Obituary: Peter Wills: 24/3/1928–28/8/2021

A true pioneer of the deer industry from the East Coast passed away earlier this year. Peter Wills is remembered by his family for a passion for deer that spanned more than eight decades.

**PETER GREW UP** at Flag Range Road, Sherenden, Hawke's Bay. His life-long passion was hunting and fishing, with him shooting his first deer aged just seven.

He attended Ngaroto school until it closed during WW2. This was followed by correspondence school before he went to boarding school at Wanganui Collegiate.

Peter was always up for adventure. While still in his 4th form, in December 1944, he and three mates pushed biked from Wanganui over the Taihape Rd to Glenross Rd leaving at 9pm straight after prize giving. He remembered coming over the Gentle Annie having to use manuka branches to help slow them down on the 2½ day journey. On a second trip they biked from Wanganui to home via Taupo – a 5-day journey.

His adventures continued in 1947 when, aged 19, he and two mates went to the Southern Alps to shoot thar and to do some climbing. George Lowe, who was teaching in Sherenden at the time, went with them as a guide. (Lowe went on to be part of the team who climbed with Sir Edmund Hilary on his first ascent of Everest.) They climbed the Hooker Glacier, The Tasman Glacier and Mt De La Beche just north of Aoraki/Mt Cook.

When he'd left school Peter worked on the family farm and poisoned rabbits after work selling the skins to be used for the fuel tanks in Spitfires and in jackets during the war. With the proceeds

from the skins he bought his first Cat 22 Bulldozer and started a career cultivating the backcountry areas of Hawke's Bay.

In the early 1950s Peter met Beryl Mardon and they married on 20 November 1953. Peter and Beryl moved onto a 16-hectare block at Mangateretere where Peter continued to do contracting and planted tomatoes and potatoes, later converting the block to a stonefruit orchard.

During this time he took yearly hunting trips to the Kawekas, Ruahines, Kaimanawas or Fiordland, where he hunted wapiti.

In early April 1971 Peter and Beryl sold the orchard to buy a farm at Mahia, north of Wairoa. There he grew potatoes as each paddock was cultivated.

It was during this time that the yearly trips to hunt deer were replaced by talk of farming them. In October 1971, Russell and Doug Somerville, Rod McCullum, Brian Horton and Peter formed

a partnership, later including Phil Creswell who was managing Woodgreen Station at the time and set up a trap system on the edge of the Ureweras.

## Snapshots in time

Writing in the early 1980s about their exploits, Peter said "our only qualifications were great imagination, optimism and an ability to consume liquid refreshments when discussing tactics".

Their first attempt to drive a mob of more than 50 feral deer into their trap was a total failure but they were undeterred and ended up fencing off about 30 hectares on the edge of the bush with large gates for the deer to pass through. This was more successful and they managed to build up a decent mob.

Today's standard practices of segregating deer by sex and age group for transport in specialised crates with good air flow were learnt the hard way: they lost the first small group of deer they attempted to transport by truck through injury or shock. Peter recalled that separate licences were needed then to hold, transport and farm deer, with regular reports to the Forest Service and fence inspections required.

All the hard work was worth it in terms of commodity prices, with the partners initially getting the equivalent of \$16.50/kg for venison in today's dollars, and about \$149/kg for A grade velvet.

Peter said the original partnership dissolved in 1979, by which time they'd accrued 101 hinds, 70 stags and 60 weaners. By the early 1980s the five partners were each successfully farming deer in their own right.

Writing in the *Wairoa Star* in 1996, the Wairoa branch of DFA noted that the big tax breaks and unrealistic prices for deer in the early days were unsustainable. In addition, the high prices for deer, unrelated to their productive value, encouraged poaching. The article said Peter was noted for the top velvet he produced.

The Wairoa DFA was bullish about prospects for deer at that point, noting a peak venison schedule of about \$15/kg in today's dollars and gross margins per stock unit for venison finishing more than double that for beef or lamb. The industry was strongly optimistic at that time, with the local DFA boasting a membership of 760.

The partnership purchased a



Early deer trap on the edge of the Ureweras.



Peter enjoyed pampering his favourite stags.

*continued on page 26*

# Radio silence best for deer?

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Feral deer are becoming a bit of a pest in Australia, and University of Tasmania honours student Lucy Turnbull is investigating whether the sounds of humans via radio could be used to shoo them away when they encroach on properties, according to a report in ABC News.

**AS WELL AS** farms and gardens, feral deer are being seen more commonly in large Australian cities like Melbourne, the report said. There are an estimated 1–2 million deer across Australia. Some populations are growing fast and Australian authorities are getting their heads around the best control options including use of recreational hunters and aerial control.

Turnbull has been experimenting with a camera trap that's set off by roaming fallow deer. When deer walk past the cameras they trigger large speakers to play ABC radio programmes and podcasts. Sure enough the animals scarper when the speakers fire up. She's now looking into practical ways of harnessing this fear response to keep deer out of conservation areas.

The story was recounted on RNZ's *Morning Report* recently. Hosts Susie Ferguson and Corin Dann were amused to think that sounds of a show like theirs might scare the bejeesus out of a wandering deer. And sure enough a New Zealand deer farmer got in touch to tell them that when he played the radio in the deer shed the animals got pretty grumpy and agitated.

So is this your experience too? Do you crank up the radio in the deer shed? The *Deer Fact Staying safe* suggests switching on the radio to help calm deer, but is silent on what sort of content deer might prefer. In addition the *Deer Code of Welfare* suggests using the radio "to accustom deer to a range of noises and voices".

If you do turn on the radio in the shed, are they soothed by Susie and calmed by Corin? Or do you tune into Newstalk and Mike makes them mad? Does Williams have them climbing the walls? Devlin set them drooling? Does talk make them tetchy but music

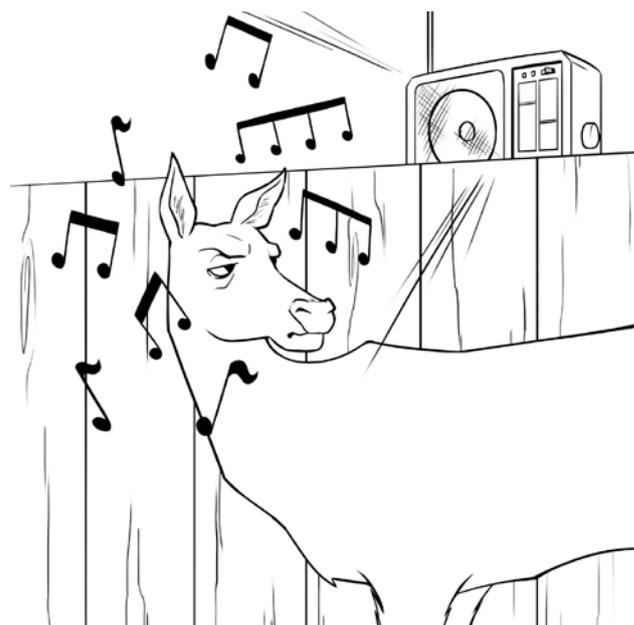


Illustration: Roy Stewart

make them mellow?

*Deer Industry News* would love to hear your stories and tips about using the radio – or not – around your deer. ■

**For the ABC News report:**

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-21/tasmania-feral-deer-impact-on-farmers-populations-spreading/100467680>

*Peter Wills: continued*

block next to Peter and Beryl's place at Mahia. That pioneered one of the first deer farms registered in New Zealand. Peter started to deer fence their farm as well. It wasn't long after that deer farming in the Wairoa area took off. Many of the Wairoa district farmers were soon looking at what the partnership were doing and keen to get into deer farming as well.

Peter was a respected member of the community and was soon being asked to give advice on how to set up farms. He was one of the founding members of the Wairoa DFA and was an active member, making many good friends through the association.

In 1984 Peter and Beryl went to China and Europe and, in 1987, he was invited by the University of Alaska to deliver a paper on "Deer Farming in New Zealand" also including their annual Caribou round-up with the Innuits. In 1994 they went to Canada.

Peter's base herd started from deer captured out of the Ureweras but he also bought hinds and weaners in the early years to improve the genetics. In 1983 he imported an English stag from JCB Park Estate in Staffordshire, England, which he affectionately

called the "The Pom". He and couple of farming mates attended the stag sales each year, with Peter buying stags from the Raroa, Windermere and Granbrooke studs.

He enjoyed the antler side and produced some very good velvet, winning many awards in local competitions. He also presented weaner deer for many years at the Gisborne A&P show, winning the best pen of stags and hinds on numerous occasions.

In his later years Peter enjoyed growing out the heads of his two best stags and watching his deer from his window. Every morning the deer would be looking in, waiting for their daily titbit of fruit or maize fed to them from the patio.

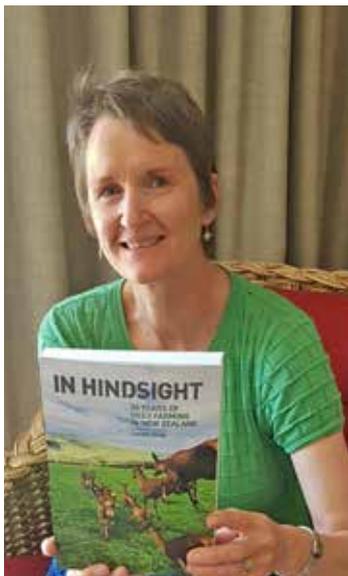
Peter was still active with his 25-odd deer right up until his passing away. The night before he died his best stag dropped one antler and just after Peter passed away he dropped the other. It seemed a fitting end to a life well lived.

He is survived by five children, 21 grandchildren and 32 great grandchildren (and still counting). ■

# Buy the book: *In Hindsight* is a beaut read!

It's been a few years now since anyone published a book featuring the development of deer farming in New Zealand, but with the launch of *In Hindsight: 50 years of deer farming in New Zealand*, it's been well worth the wait for the complete package.

**IN 2016, AGRICULTURAL** journalist Lynda Gray announced her intention to mark the upcoming 50th anniversary of New Zealand's first deer farming licence by writing a history of the industry. In the years since, she's immersed herself in deer farming's past while juggling her ongoing day-job commitments. While the written record of publications – especially *The Deer Farmer*, but also official reports and statistics plus this publication – provided a framework for Gray's research, this has been a people's story, which is what makes it such a good read.



Author Lynda Gray has captured the excitement and drama of deer farming's first 50 years with warmth and a great eye for detail.

She travelled extensively to meet industry pioneers and record their recollections and mementos. It's that groundwork that has provided the heart to this narrative and the detail needed to untangle some of the complex chapters of the deer industry's short, action-packed history.

The warmth and rattling pace of that story telling shines through and makes for a far more vivid portrait of who we are and how we got here. The book is generously peppered with photos from personal collections and official publications, with plenty of personal anecdotes.

First-hand accounts from innovators and entrepreneurs like Bryan Bassett-Smith, Robert Wilson and Tim Wallis, and scientists such as Ken Drew, enrich the history and capture an era that's now quickly fading into the past.

And the downright stubbornness of pioneers like the "Big Dad" of deer farming, Bob Swann ("I was pig headed and decided I was going to buck the system and go deer farming anyway") reminds us how much the industry owes to those few who combined a passion for the animal with a determination to overcome bureaucratic hurdles.

Gray has organised the narrative chronologically into five periods, tracing the history of deer farming from the wild excitement of the early days of live recovery ("A flying start – 1970–1984") to the most recent period ("The new wave – 2011–2020").

While more recent decades have had less of the white-knuckle excitement of the earliest years, Gray shows the dramas have continued in other arenas, from the spectacular failure of Venison New Zealand to the turbulent days of velvet ventures such as Velconz and NZ Velvet Marketing Co and the creation of Deer Industry New Zealand.

The contribution of vets and scientists to the deer industry hasn't been overlooked, and *In Hindsight* gives a sobering reminder that challenges such as Tb and Johne's disease have been confronted and overcome only very recently.

The industry has matured in more recent years to become an established part of mainstream livestock farming backed by good science and committed marketers. While deer farming is in calmer waters as its 50th year rolls around, there are stark signs that challenges will continue (think Covid impacts on venison markets, increasing compliance pressure and more). *In Hindsight* is a timely reminder that the deer industry has confronted and overcome big challenges in the past and will continue to do so.

We're here to stay. Get the book.

- *In Hindsight: 50 years of deer farming in New Zealand* is published for Lynda Gray by Quentin Wilson Publishing. The book is sponsored by NZDFA, PGG Wrightson, Mountain River Venison, First Light, Alliance Group, Jeff Pearse and Provelco. Cost is \$54.95 plus P+P.

To order a copy email [inhindsightnz@gmail.com](mailto:inhindsightnz@gmail.com) ■



Bryan Bassett-Smith with a Rakaia stag live recovered at Potts River on Erehon Station. Photo: Bryan Bassett-Smith collection.

# Environmental appointment

Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) is pleased to announce the appointment of Sara Elmes as the new Environmental Stewardship Manager (ESM).

**THE ESM WILL** work with individual deer farmers, NZDFA and the DINZ manager – farm performance to help ensure that deer farming remains a profitable, sustainable land use operating within accepted environmental constraints. Areas of focus are primarily management of freshwater quality, indigenous biodiversity, soil health, biological greenhouse gas emissions and climate change adaptation.

Sara has a Masters in Animal Science (genetics) from Massey University and has previously worked with Dr Geoff Asher and Jamie Ward at AgResearch, Invermay on deer genetics.

Sara also has connections with many deer farmers through her current position at Ballance Agri-Nutrients and regularly attends deer industry conferences and activities in her region.

DINZ welcomes Sara to the new role and is confident that, with her deep understanding of deer farming and deer farmers together

with her science background and strength and expertise in environmental management, she will provide a clear and practical voice for deer farmers to be able to operate profitably while effectively managing their environmental footprint.

Sara commenced the role on 17 December. ■



# Not all sires are equal...

by Sharon McIntyre and Grant Hasse

**A RECENT P2P** programme demonstrating the value of improved genetics on commercial farms involved three farms using two sires to validate the Breeding Value variation and reliability between sires.

John and Tash Hamilton of Winton, Southland, selected two wapiti bulls with a Breeding Value variation of about 6kg at 12 months of age. On Deer Select, the true Breeding Value of the two wapiti sires was +12.5kg and +6.7kg respectively for weight at 12 months of age.

The bulls selected were naturally mated to a selection of “similar” commercial hybrid hinds in two mobs. Post mating these mobs were boxed up to be wintered and fawn together. Their progeny were weaned at almost exactly the same weight – 67kg – on 3 March.

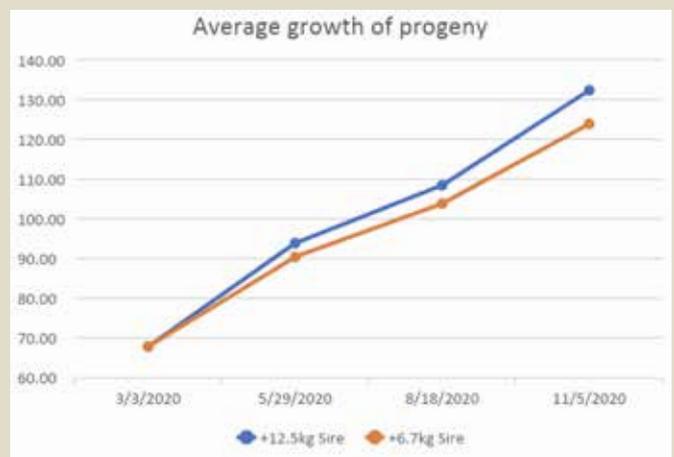
The weaners were run together and weighed at regular intervals through to the first draft on 5 November. Average weights for progeny of the two sires were as follows:

	Sire +12.5kg	Sire +6.7kg
Male progeny	141kg*	130kg
Female progeny	123kg	118kg
Balanced for sex	132kg	124kg

**\*The heaviest male was 158kg!**

When analysing these results and assuming all progeny were processed on the same day, the higher-ranked wapiti bull’s offspring were on average 8kg heavier.

Transferring the additional 8kg into dollars, on a \$6.60 schedule and dressing percentage of 55%, the Breeding Value



variation between these two wapiti bulls is +\$28.60 in favour of the higher-ranked bull.

On all three farms, the P2P Project proved higher Breeding Values for growth do result in heavier and earlier venison animals under commercial farming conditions.

Genetic performance indicators have been helping with breeding selections since the mid 1900s and have made amazing gains in agriculture.

NOW! More than ever, is the time for farmers to utilise research-proven science to help lift returns through genetic selection, be that the use of Breeding Values, CARLA results, Terminal Income values or earlier slaughter dates, to list a few. ■

• Article supplied

# ELK & WAPITI SUPPLIERS

## Trophy Suppliers:

Tracey McLean - Achnanat - tracey@sockworks.co.nz

Paul Waller - Longridge Elk - pwaller@gmail.com

John Falconer - Clachanburn - john@cbdeer.co.nz

Tom May - Mayfield Elk Farm - tom@mayfieldelk.com

Neville Cunningham - Mt Cook Trophy Hunting - contact@mtcooktrophyhunting.co.nz

## Terminal Sire - Auctions:

### Raincliff Station Wapiti:

Pleasant Point

Mon 10th Jan 2022, 10am

Dave Morgan, 027-230 3357

### Lochinvar Wapiti:

Te Anau

Sun 16th Jan 2022, 11am

Ross Carran, 027-289 7563

### Littlebourne Wapiti:

Winton

Mon 17th Jan 2022, 1pm

Geoff Pullar. 027-617 9971

## Private Treaty Suppliers

### North Is:

#### Totara Park Wapiti:

Dean Wilkinson, totarapark@orcon.net.nz

Ph 027-403 5440

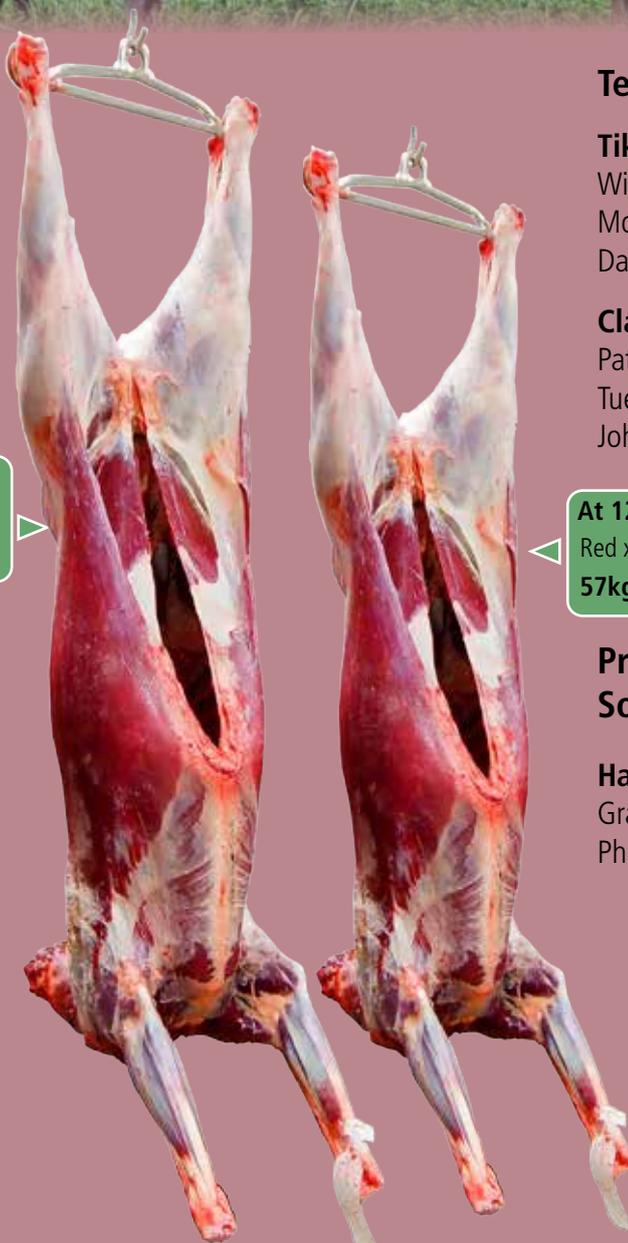
#### Steinvale Wapiti:

Harley Steiner, Ph 027-431 7431

#### Oraka Wapiti:

Ian Scott, orakadeer@xtra.co.nz

At 12 mths  
Wapiti x Red  
70kg



At 12 mths  
Red x Red  
57kg

## Terminal Sire - Auctions:

### Tikana Wapiti:

Winton

Mon 17th Jan 2022, 3.30pm

Dave Lawrence, 03-236 4117

### Clachanburn Elk:

Patearoa,

Tues 18th Jan 2022, 1pm

John Falconer, 027-434 4593

## Private Treaty Sire Suppliers South Is:

### Hasse Elk Farm:

Grant Hasse, hasseelk@gmail.com

Ph 027-224 5542

### Montalto Elk:

John Bartholomew, jbart@xtra.co.nz

Ph 027-490 5782

### Edendale Wapiti:

Mt Somers,

Donald Whyte, 03-303 9842

# ELK WAPITI SOCIETY NZ

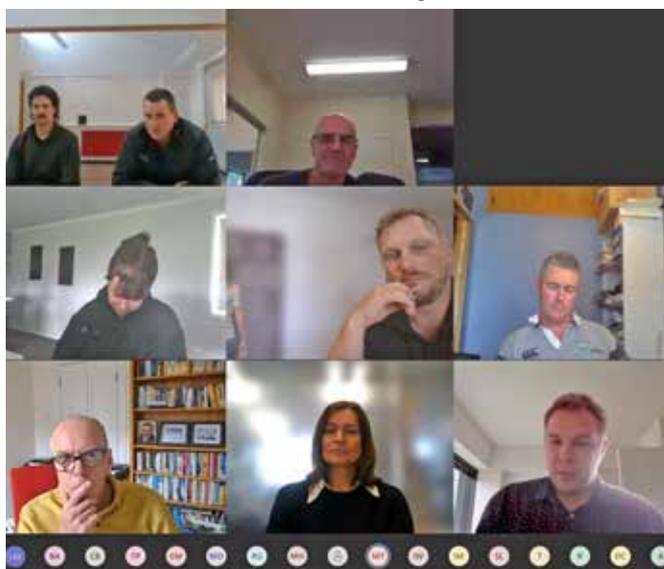
For further information: [www.elkwapitisociety.co.nz](http://www.elkwapitisociety.co.nz) / [elkwapitinz@gmail.com](mailto:elkwapitinz@gmail.com)

# Branch chairs forced into virtual mode

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The Covid-19 pandemic had the last say in arrangements for the 2021 NZDFA branch chairs' meeting, with the in-person event cancelled just the day before it was due to start. The two-day programme was pared back to essential business only for two sessions on Tuesday 12 October.

**ALTHOUGH THE MEETING** could have been safely held with the usual precautions under Wellington's then Alert Level 2 setting, the risk of individuals being unable to get back to farms in the event of a sudden lockdown was considered too high.



It was a return to online discourse for the October branch chairs' meeting.

The cancellation also meant the opportunity for NZDFA chairs to acknowledge in person the massive contribution of outgoing DINZ producer manager Tony Pearse at the formal dinner was denied. Another to feel the impact was writer Lynda Gray who had rushed advance copies of her new history of the first 50 years of deer farming, *In Hindsight*, to Wellington for a launch at the branch chairs' dinner (see book review page 27).

But the deer industry is nothing if not adaptable and numbers at the virtual meeting were about the same as previous "live" events.

## "NewPro" – a succession plan for P2P

The current Primary Growth Partnership between DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries, Passion2Profit, finishes in just 9 months' time but preparations to apply for co-funding of a successor programme are well underway. Unlike the popular metaphor of building a plane while you're flying it, this job is more like designing a new plane for the next leg of the journey while still landing the previous one.

That new build for a successor programme is being coordinated by DINZ farm performance manager **Phil McKenzie**. He explained an initial application would go to potential co-funders by the end of this year with a business case submitted towards mid 2022 and a new programme, current working title "NewPro", starting later in 2022 after P2P wraps up.

The overall aim is to retain what's worked well under P2P and build on that, rather than continuing with more of the same. NewPro would be even more widely inclusive than P2P, which directly engaged about 30 percent of deer farmers. McKenzie said the ongoing involvement of the DFA in development and co-ownership of the new programme was essential and it was hoped to attract people who'd been previously scared off by the level of commitment needed for Advance Party (AP) membership or other group activities.

NewPro will retain the parallel work streams of marketing premium venison and market-led production but further strengthen ties between farms and markets. The marketing side for NewPro will focus on development in the United States and China, while other market-related activity would be covered under DINZ's "business as usual" programmes.

On the production side, the P2P development work on animal health plans and feeding tools is now considered to be completed. Under NewPro the on-farm activities would feature integration projects such as winter grazing, farm environment groups, an evolution of APs, improved breeding and access to experts.

McKenzie said building a successful programme required good input from all perspectives – farmers, processors, customers, rural professionals and others – to really understand what they wanted it to deliver.

Integrated value chains that delivered more value to farmers, especially through recognition and reward for high environment and welfare standards may be explored. Ongoing work to make deer farming easier and more productive, while exporters develop new markets, is a priority.

By mid October, 12 potential projects for NewPro had been developed. Some of these, such as "Deer Clubs" and "Next Stage Rural Professionals" were an evolution of things that have worked well under P2P. Others such as "Deer Connect" (engaging group-averse farmers one-on-one) or "Deer Farm Ladder" (helping the next generation of deer farmers into the industry) are new.

The online meeting split up into breakout sessions where branch chairs chewed over the things the DFA does well, and how it could be an active part of NewPro. An ongoing concern

during P2P and looking ahead, is that well-resourced and popular programmes like these can starve the DFA branches of oxygen. McKenzie said that by working closely as part of NewPro, the Association could actually increase its relevance and help provide its members with value.

One area where the DFA could lead was a “Regional Meetings with Insight” project. This builds on the successes of APs, tech expos and regional workshops and would provide time-poor deer farmers with an opportunity to take part in a local event with high-quality content that’s relevant to local conditions and (possibly) sponsors.

At this point nothing is set in stone and there are various options for design of the “new plane” for the next leg of the journey. McKenzie said there may be further project ideas developed while others could morph into DINZ “business as usual” activities. The key is for DFA branch chairs and members to seize the opportunity to get on board with NewPro and make it their own, he said.

## Venison marketing

Getting venison business back to pre-pandemic levels will be more marathon than sprint, but DINZ venison marketing manager Nick Taylor reminded branch chairs there has been a heap of market development activity going on throughout, with some promising signs while everyone awaits a more sustainable schedule. Retail was expanding in new markets and foodservice was gradually coming back, he said.

US retail is relatively new territory for New Zealand venison marketers but Taylor said individual companies are already

making good inroads with a variety of products such as ground venison, racks and a “tomahawk” cut adapted to US tastes. Mountain River Venison was working well through Force of Nature, which strongly promoted regenerative agriculture (RA) with its brand (see more about RA on page 16). Other marketers were also working effectively with US market partners. Silver Fern Farms was promoting online sales of a premium ground product and First Light had introduced venison meatballs.

Taylor said three New Zealand venison marketers were active in China, with a fourth awaiting plant certification.

A lot was being done to adapt venison to Chinese cuisine and, as well as selling through Western hotels, marketers were targeting Chinese households. Venison dishes were being trialled in two restaurant chains: the top-end Lei Garden and the Western fusion-themed Gaga restaurants. Feedback to date had been very positive, Taylor said.

DINZ was slightly increasing its investment in the New Zealand

### US Retail



A range of US in-market partners are working with New Zealand venison marketers.

*continued on page 32*



Warnham Park

**On-Farm Sire Stag Sale offering  
ELITE 3YR OLD SIRES  
Plus Velvetting Stags and Yearling Hinds  
14 Jan 2022  
9:30am**

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Rural livestock (Craig North 027 473 0864) and  
Pgg Wrightson (Graham Kinsman 027 422 3154)



**Hawkeye**  
18.3 Kg  
of Antler



*Branch chairs: continued*

market as well. “It will never match our commitment to overseas markets but domestic consumers are still important.”

A \$400,000 marketing innovation fund was being made available this year for companies to support short-term work to develop or expand new channels. Companies have by now applied to DINZ for funding and announcements were due this month.

Funding was also available for joint venison positioning. First Light’s venison teamed with Lewis Road steak butter and Mountain River’s in-store partnership in Sweden (see article on page 9) were examples of this.



There’s plenty of work going on to make venison and Chinese cuisine work together.

## Q+A for venison marketers

**“What will be the impact this season of the amount of frozen product being held in Europe?”**

Alliance’s **Katrina Allan** said there’d been a good start to the chilled season and less wild boar around, so any backlogs were clearing well.

**John Sadler** (Mountain River Venison) agreed we needed a good strong lead-in to Christmas in Europe. Depressed prices, although not ideal, were driving good sales in both foodservice and retail, he said. He said New Zealand’s future was in a well-differentiated premium product, and not so much as part of the game mix. Ultimately retail was not a panacea, he warned.

**“What about consumer products for the US market?”**

Silver Fern Farms’ **Dave Courtney** was enthusiastic about the company’s progress in US retail with its ground product. It was giving bison meat a run for its money and also opening the way for higher value cuts. “We’re starting to see good growth off a small base.”

**Matt Gibson** of First Light said they had a three-pronged approach with products for the United States: a tri-protein meatball pack, the “one-pound brick” of ground venison, and the leg steak paired with butter.

Katrina Allan said Alliance Group was looking to roll out venison beside beef and lamb through UK channels including Hello Fresh and online retailer Ocado.

## Joint venison positioning fund



DINZ funds have been used to support joint venison positioning in new markets.

**Andy Duncan** (Duncan NZ Venison) said the United States was a good fit for New Zealand venison “but we need to create the demand first”.

**“Is NZ venison in China going through restaurants or retail?”**

Alliance is working through Grand Farm in China to retail three products including a venison equivalent of a “lamb roll” and cubed products for a hot pot dish. Katrina Allan said they were developing recipes designed to stop venison going brown when it was sliced thinly – apparently a turnoff for that market.

Silver Fern Farms was working with Sam’s Club in China to add venison to their range. Dave Courtney said foodservice, retail and the petfood sectors had potential in China and they were doing market research as they built up consumer awareness.

**“Is there demand for mixed age stags?”**

None of the marketers seemed to think a build-up of mixed age stags coming through for processing was creating any issues, although John Sadler noted that the priority for processing would always be premium venison.

**“Has the petfood market affected the schedule?”**

First Light’s **Matt Gibson** said some petfood manufacturers took venison out of the mix when it got too expensive, but there was still a demand for it in higher-end petfood.

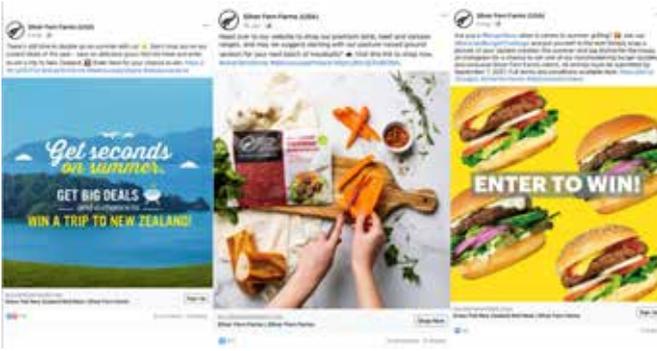
**Rob Kidd** (Duncan NZ) said bone and mechanically deboned meat were the biggest petfood ingredients along with some offal, and it was important to get these back into demand. “Feral product can depress the prices for petfood ingredients.”

**“Why was the spring schedule peak period so short this year?”**

Andy Duncan said the peak this year wasn’t much shorter than some earlier seasons, but shipping logistics meant the cut-off had been brought forward, which did squeeze the schedule peak window.

**“How long will the venison price recovery take?”**

Dave Courtney said demand needed to be built ahead of supply. This wouldn’t happen fast, but there were good signs from Europe that inventory was being cleared. Andy Duncan added that “I’d be disappointed if farmers were still talking about exit [from the industry] this time next year.”



Silver Fern Farms is positioning venison products to suit US tastes.

“Could processors split the prices paid for each carcass between the meat cuts and other components?”

John Sadler said it’s the total value of the carcass that matters most, adding that the idea would be difficult to implement because tails are not graded until well after slaughter.

“Should venison from elk/wapiti be differentiated?”

There is some merit in the idea in the United States at least, where consumers recognise elk/wapiti as a distinct product. John Sadler noted that Mountain River has separate SKUs (product categories) for venison and elk/wapiti product in the United States, effectively doubling the amount of real estate available on shelves.

### Velvet: optimism for stable season

Rhys Griffiths, DINZ manager, markets, said the traditional

500-tonne supply trigger point for a volume-driven fall in prices no longer applied, although he cautioned the link between volume and price hadn’t broken completely.

The move away from commodity status and rise of the healthy food sector was behind the rise in demand and volumes on the back of stable prices.

Early-season reports were of prices steady or slightly firmer on last season with strong underlying demand in China and Korea (see updated velvet market report on page 12).

Griffiths said five of eight new healthy food products launched in Korea over the past few months had New Zealand velvet as an ingredient. Interest in healthy food products in China was also strong, although he warned that freight logistics challenges and regulatory hurdles would continue. Overall, more than 40 companies now had contemporary food products featuring New Zealand velvet as an ingredient.

Geopolitics (the deteriorating relations between Australia and China for example), and ongoing Covid-19 outbreaks posed risks in Asian markets. On the plus side, opportunities for healthy functional food products continued to grow and potential new markets in other countries like Taiwan were expanding. The incremental reduction in tariffs on velvet going into Korea was improving conditions for New Zealand exporters there: by 1 January 2022 the original 20% tariff will be down to 9.3%.

VelTrak had been well received in our markets, as had the updated Technical Manual. Griffiths said international travel restrictions had been circumvented via webinars for the research and marketing teams from universities and major food companies.

*continued on page 34*

## 21<sup>st</sup> Elite Sire Stag & Yearling Hind Sale



**Lot 1 2022 – O975 9.1kg**  
Bluerock x PM Key 3yr Son





**O842 11kg**  
Joseph x Zama 3yr Son

### Wednesday 12th January 2022, 6.30pm



**Bluerock – 13.1kg @ 6yrs**  
1<sup>st</sup> 3yr Sons 2022

Sires Represented:

**Joseph**  
**Max**  
**Lazarus**  
**Maple**

**80+ 2yr Velvet Stags**



**The Emperor – 14.2kg @ 4yrs**  
1<sup>st</sup> Yearling Hinds 2022

**Eddie Brock 027 6076822**

**Elliot Brock 027 2776733**

**Facebook: Brock Deer**

Branch chairs: continued

He said DINZ was working closely with these companies through MOUs and joint promotions, especially during Chuseok (the Korean mid-autumn harvest festival equivalent of Thanksgiving). DINZ was also helping sponsor a “Traditional Chinese Medicine Covid-19 Recovery Festival”.

Formal relationships with Chinese food companies were being established and of course the China Velvet Coalition of PGG Wrightson, CK Import Export and Provelco was now under way – also getting on board with the healthy food strategy.

New Zealand velvet was definitely gaining ground and status with younger consumers and producers of healthy foods, while older patients and Oriental medicine doctors still favoured Russian velvet, he said.

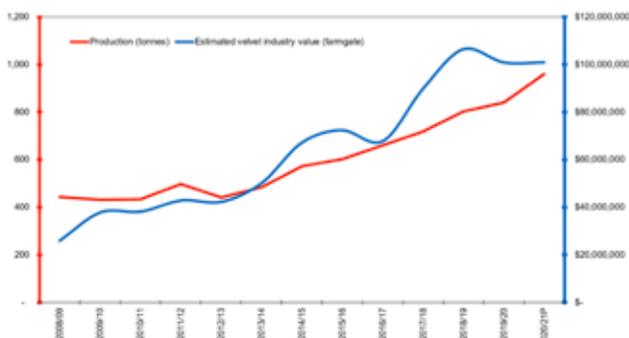
**Provelco**

**Ross Chambers** said sentiment was good and pre-season interest suggests another solid season ahead. “If the large Chinese importers are confident then others are confident. It’s early, but so far so good. Our Chinese buyers are certainly in this category.”

Fundamentals were mixed, he said. “The influence of late delivery on 2020/21 product remains uncertain but there is a theory that buyers with high stock levels are motivated to keep prices firm.

“Shipping, and getting (and keeping) bookings will remain challenging. Chinese import regulations remain dynamic, with another ‘work around’ in place for 2021/22.

**Current situation**



There are no signs yet that growing volumes are affecting returns.

“So far demand for velvet does not seem to have been affected by the social and economic upheaval summarised as the ‘quest for common prosperity’ and resource shortages. All of these potentially influence the demand for luxury goods.”

**CK Import Export**

**Shaun Stevenson** said this season was starting stronger than last, with no downward pressure on prices. Logistics and securing container space were the biggest challenges, he said. The growing

volumes of velvet were being managed okay, but he was a little concerned about the rising amount in the SA NT (non-traditional) grade. While there was no evidence the efficacy of this velvet was inferior in any way to SA, it was a matter of educating customers. Prices for the grade could be forced down if markets couldn’t absorb it.

Stevenson said there was potential for market growth in other countries with high populations of ethnic Chinese.

**PGG Wrightson**

**Tony Cochrane** was upbeat, noting there was no carryover stock in the system and Korean GDP was up. PGG Wrightson had started the season with minimum price contracts with suppliers, providing a floor for all sellers. He was optimistic about China and said there was a risk we might not be able to satisfy growing demand. “We need to keep up.”

Cochrane said only 30 percent of New Zealand velvet is going into healthy food products so far and he sees great potential for lifting that number, especially now quality assurance and VelTrak have increased confidence in the New Zealand product. He said outcomes of research into benefits such as brain function and anti-fatigue could help further drive demand.

**Board Q+A**

Branches submitted a long list of questions for the DINZ Board, who tried valiantly to answer as many as possible before time, dictated by the online format, ran out.

**P2P: was it a success? Successor programme for P2P: what are the priorities?**

DINZ chair **Ian Walker** said the board thought P2P had been successful and the governance structure with an advisory group and independently chaired steering group had worked well. The relationship with co-funder the Ministry for Primary Industries had also worked well and the programme had been adaptable to changing needs when the need for an environmental strand became clear after it started.

Board member **Mandy Bell** said the secret to a successor programme was understanding the short and long-term challenges such as market volatility, environmental pressures and the opportunities to utilise the whole animal. Items such as the integrated value chain project needed a 10-year horizon, she said. “Cut-through” themes applied across all of the suggested projects for “NewPro” and included “telling our stories” as well as the Te Taiao “Fit for a Better World” framework. “We need to connect these to what we do on farm,” Bell said. “The DFA and branch chairs can really help with this.”

**Venison: How can we stop farmers leaving industry?**

Board member **Gerard Hickey** said it was important to keep

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investing in market development during this difficult period. He added that both DINZ and the venison marketers could do a better job communicating more proactively with venison producers.

### Venison: what's the DINZ board doing about prices and are all companies on board?

"We know what we need to do," said board member Dave Courtney. "Sometimes we collaborate and other times we work alone. Everyone is finding their own space to work in."

### Venison: why are alternative proteins at 10-year highs and venison stuck where it is?

Nigel Jones, of the DINZ Board, said more work was needed to address alternative proteins. He said venison marketing should focus on large population centres in first-world countries. Covid-19 was accelerating the pace of change in our markets and Jones said we need to do a better job communicating venison's virtues.

### Velvet: is support available for marketing initiatives outside the China Velvet Coalition (CVC)?

DINZ chief executive **Innes Moffat** confirmed that support for market initiatives is available beyond the CVC. Board member **Kris Orange** noted that putting the CVC together had taken a big effort by Rhys Griffiths and the companies, and financial support from DINZ and NZ Trade & Enterprise.

### Velvet: is NZ too exposed to China, given the geopolitical risks?

Nigel Jones said we were currently trying to diversify into China and we had traditionally had a narrow spread of markets. Referring more to venison than velvet, he noted we are also diversifying into the United States and United Kingdom. "We're

less exposed to China than some other primary sectors."

### Markets: Potential for deer blood products in Asia?

Rhys Griffiths provided a written answer to this: He said deer blood isn't straightforward as according to MPI there is no protocol set up in China to import and sell it (no specific category in either health/medicinal or food products).

However deer blood remains on the New Zealand deer industry's formal Market Access Priority List submitted to MPI along with bones and other products/markets, he added. "MPI has been firm that, due to its lack of classification, getting access for blood will be more difficult than bones and other co-products. We are all frustrated by the lack of access for bones, etc."

### Research: Is it adequate and correctly targeted?

**Mark Harris**, DINZ board, said the restructuring of deer research into Innovation Steering Groups and the addition of a low-cost learning phase to test and modify proposals before they got fully underway were significant changes. He said the industry can sometimes pay only one-third of the full cost of a research programme, but harvest all of the benefit. The steering groups comprised "top people" he said.

New projects looking at the functional properties of venison, climate-sensitive deer health issues and lungworm super-shedders were examples of well-targeted research.

DINZ and AgResearch would continue to assess and tweak the new research framework where necessary, but a fundamental need was for deer farmers, through the DFA, to communicate their research priorities.

Innes Moffat noted that "producer manager emeritus" Tony Pearse would be helping facilitate that process. ■

## Keeping it real

**THE VENISON PRODUCTION** ability of Clachanburn Elk sires is spelled out in the November 2021 Deer Select Wapiti sire summary. They feature consistently in the top three for weaning weight, 12-month weight, carcass weight, and parasite resistance (CARLA) breeding value tables.

A Clachanburn elk is also ranked second in the Terminal Index which estimates the expected dollar difference per calf produced by the bull.

The science backing supports John and Mary Falconer's overriding goal of breeding venison sires that will perform and deliver in a real-life commercial-scale venison system.

"The weight-based breeding values speak for themselves," John says.

"But the CARLA breeding value is equally important. Drench resistance is becoming a big issue for the industry, which is why we're selecting for resistance to internal parasites. Deer with a greater immune response grow bigger and faster and are less expensive to rear."

As well as Deer Select, the Falconers use other technologies to ensure Clachanburn sires are fit for purpose. One example, not widely used in the deer industry, is the fertility and service capacity testing of all rising three-year-old bulls.

"It's an added assurance for our clients that our sires will perform."

The Falconers continue to evolve and fine tune both their elk and red deer stud breeding businesses to meet client and market needs.

Science and technology tools are important components in the breeding programmes; so too are traditional stock and selection criteria.

The latest development in the elk stud, is the addition of cows from the recently dispersed Connemara Wapiti stud, increasing the fully recorded herd to 700. On offer at the Clachanburn sale on 18 January 2022 are 25 Connemara three-year-old bulls.

"Connemara genetics are well known and respected in the industry. Introducing them to our stud will provide genetic linkage across herds and provide a more robust measure of the genetic worth of our sires," John says.

The focus of the elk programme is to breed a venison sire that will turn out high growth rate hybrid progeny and, during its lifetime, produce a good head of velvet. Clachanburn Station is the ideal proving ground for these genetics, which are used across the Falconers' large-scale hybrid weaner finishing operation.

"We're in the business of breeding, feeding and finishing high-growth-rate hybrid progeny," John says. "We like to help our clients meet their own deer farming objectives by supplying them with high-performance terminal sires." ■

• Article supplied



**Clachanburn Tuscon:** Globally sought-after bull with progeny in UK, Australia and Korea.



**Clachanburn Skyfall:** 600kg Bull, 74" span – 100% amazing!



**Tombstone:** 19kg at 5 years old cut at Clachanburn



# Clachanburn Deer

Breeding Top Growth Rate Animals for the Real World



Connemara bulls on offer this year, including sons of Meads

**Elk & Wapiti Bull Sale: Tuesday 18 January 2022, 1.00pm**  
**John & Mary Falconer: 03 444 7511, 027 434 4593, info@cbdeerco.nz**



**Storm:** Outstanding and multi-award winning Bull, estimated 25kg of velvet in 2021!



**Big Country, Big Bulls, Big Returns!**