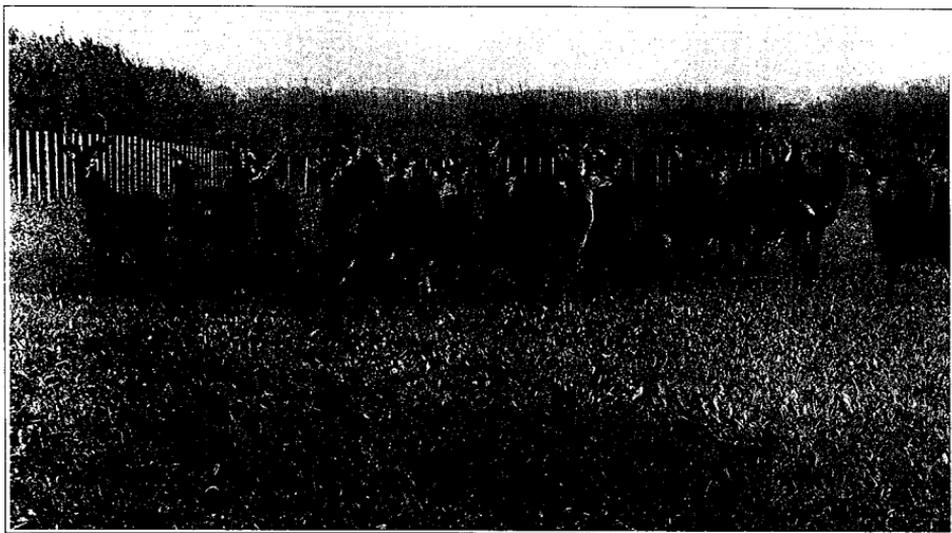


Quality pasture dramatically improves venison production

Stag fawns average 92 kg by August

by Dr Warren Hunt, DSIR Grasslands



Winter growth of weaners is maximised on "Grasslands Tama"

The main goal of 90 kg live weight by October/November was easily met

A NOVEL pasture system is being tested by DSIR Grasslands and the South Waikato Deer Farmers Association (SWDFA) in a continuation of their combined efforts to improve profitability of the pastoral farming of deer.

The pastoral system emphasises pasture quality and aims to provide the best possible pasture feeds for hinds during lactation and the best possible winter feed for weaners, in order to finish yearlings by the following spring.

Species tested in this research were selected from earlier trials by DSIR Grasslands and SWDFA on Joe and Anne Minkhorst's property in the Waikato.

These trials showed 'Grasslands G27' red clover and 'Grasslands Puna' chicory to be highly acceptable to lactating Red hinds during

summer, and that perennial ryegrass was poorly accepted.

'Grasslands Tama' westerwolds ryegrass will be used for the winter phase. 'Grasslands Tama' is similar to the highly palatable (in winter) 'Grasslands Moata' but is better suited to our purpose in that it dies out quickly after spring, leaving room for the summer growers.

Tama is oversown on the red clover or chicory crop during early March when hinds are removed at weaning. The weaners are able to continue feeding on the summer crop until the Tama is trodden in, germinates and begins to take over.

Hence the weaners don't suffer feed check to growth because the change-over from the summer crop to the Tama ryegrass is gradual. Weaners are rotationally grazed ahead of the hinds to get the best pick of the feed.

The vigorous winter growth of the Tama provides greater amounts of higher quality feed than would a traditional ryegrass-based pasture, so winter growth of weaners is maximised.

By the following spring a large surplus of Tama and the chicory (which has begun to grow again) is available to make high quality conserved feed (balage or silage) after which the growth of Tama stops.

The perennial summer species are then free from competition to continue growth for the next lactation period.

The first year's results are summarised by the figure 'Big pasture quality effects on venison production'. Benefits of the system were first evident from big improvements in weaning weights following the summer lactation phase with wean-

NUTRITION

▷ ing weights 15 per cent higher (stag and hind fawns) for chicory and 10 per cent higher (stags +12 per cent, hinds +9 per cent) for red clover.

The hinds were removed at weaning but the fawns stayed on the high quality pastures which were oversown with Tama ryegrass.

By July the advantage over resident pasture had increased to 21 per cent for the chicory (+23 per cent for stags, 19 per cent for hinds) and 15 per cent for red clover, (+17 per cent for stags and +13 per cent for hinds). Weight gains overall were very small from July to August, but the stags on the chicory made the most progress.

The advantage in August increased to 24 per cent on the chicory (+30 per cent stags, +18 per cent hinds) but remained the same on red clover at +15 per cent (+19 per cent stags, +11 per cent hinds). These advantages continued into November with +20 per cent for chicory (+24 per cent stags, +15 per cent hinds) and +10 per cent for red clover stags and hinds.

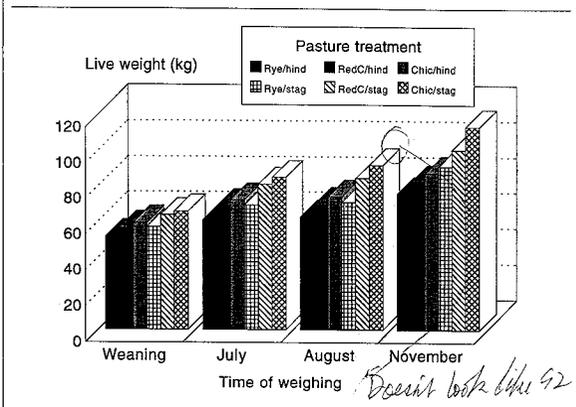
The top stag yearling on the chicory treatment at this stage weighed a phenomenal 134 kg, had shed his spikes and was growing a head of velvet at 11 months of age.

These results are outstanding and indicate that high quality pastures will be of major benefit to south Waikato deer farmers.



DSIR Grasslands' Warren Hunt
Checking out the chicory in March '91

Chicory pasture increases growth



Chicory in particular has the potential for high venison production and will enable the goals of the project to be met.

The main goal of achieving a killing weight of 90 kg live weight by October/November was easily met by the stag fawns on the chicory which averaged 92 kg by August.

The project is in its second year with adjustments made according to the

first year's experience. Problems identified include bird strike on the oversown Tama and difficulty timing the silage cuts to give adequate regrowth in time for fawning.

The chicory does not grow to potential at all sites and suffers from disease at others. These problems are being investigated along with reliable methods for establishing and maintaining dense vigorous stands of chicory. □



Red clover and Grasslands Tama
Both grasses have proved their worth to Waikato farmers