

Deer Industry News



Standing tall

BOLD ACTION

Succession secures Rangimoe legacy

POISED & POSITIVE

Stable outlook for NZ venison

BIG DATA

Using Deer Select for commercial gain



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DINZ Conference
14 - 15 May 2025, Queenstown

Deer Industry News

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF DEER INDUSTRY
NEW ZEALAND AND THE NEW ZEALAND
DEER FARMERS' ASSOCIATION

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Cover photo: 2024 MSD/Allflex Deer Industry photo competition 1st place - Kristen Rowe, Dundas Creek Stags

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Keep squeezing

In a recent 'Country-Wide' podcast Nuffield Scholar and AgFirst consultancy chief executive James Allan talked about how production within NZ's primary sector had plateaued. He said that to take performance to the next level we needed to drive efficiency which would mean "squeezing more juice from the lemon."

It got me thinking about the overall efficiency of our industry. Have we become more efficient at producing venison and velvet - have we squeezed more juice from the lemon and increased dollar returns? The industry's all-encompassing project to do just that was Passion to Profit (P2P). The big goal of the \$15 million, seven year project that wrapped up in 2022 was to earn another \$56 million in export revenue by changing the way deer were farmed and venison was marketed, and to reverse the decline in deer numbers. P2P failed to deliver the big prize; deer numbers retrenched and in addition to that was the big disruptor of Covid. However, it did positively change the way deer are farmed and venison marketed even though these outcomes weren't overtly apparent at P2P's conclusion. In my opinion the paybacks are only now surfacing - the present above-average venison returns comparative to lamb are a testament to that.

At the industry conference there was talk and tangible evidence of how we are pushing for efficiency through value-adding. A good example is the approach our industry marketers are taking by homing in on niche markets with venison and velvet products. The elk meat market in North America falls into that specialized market category, with the sourcing and development of specific cuts from animals with proven elk genetics to grow a year-round market with above-schedule returns for suppliers. The marketers have worked hard to establish this market, and it's up to farmers to support them. It was heartening to hear that conference field day hosts Ru and Kate Gaddum (see page 18) are doing just that, introducing elk genetics to their deer system to supply First Light Food's elk programme.

The AgResearch multi-species forage pastures for winter project is another value-add piece of research that's proved how a brassica-based diverse pasture can improve deer nutrition, grow more drymatter and push more venison out the gate. The concept and thinking encouraged central North Island dairy and deer farmer Tom Wilson to try out a multi-species block on his dairy platform, and he is now considering how it could be used to best effect in his deer system.

For more science-backed practical ideas on how to improve efficiency have a read of Richard Hilson's experience (see page 24) of using DeerSelect for smarter selection within his commercial velvet system.

Circling back to the podcast, James Allan acknowledged how increasing compliance and regulation had dampened the appetite to drive efficiency, but regardless the primary sector needed to break through the production barrier. His sentiments are echoed by outgoing NZDFA executive member and AgResearch scientist Jamie Ward, who in his final *Stagline* report talked about the important role innovation (in my view a prerequisite for efficiency) had played in building the deer industry. He lamented that policy and process had stifled innovation and nowadays many businesses and industries were in a defensive rather than innovative mode with little energy to look at smart ways to drive business and the economy. He challenged everyone to support the space and freedom for innovation to drive meaningful change and the economy. Let's hold that thought and keep squeezing the lemon. ■

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Right place, right time

Kristen Rowe, winner of the 2024 MSD/Allflex deer industry competition, couldn't have planned her winning photo (this issue's front cover). Taken at the end of 2022, Kristen and her husband were feeding out to a mob of stags on their Ashurst farm, inland from Palmerston North. "I wanted a good photo of stags with the Ruahine ranges in the background, so I had my good camera with me," she explains. The Rowes were ready to leave the paddock when two stags started sparring. "It was stags being stags, and if you look closely you can see the dust they're making." The winning photo is one of five entered by Rowe who is keen and handy with the camera. Another photo snapped ten years ago of hoggets grazing crop backdropped by Mt Ruapehu made the cover of the PGGWrightson calendar and was later reproduced on an interior wall of stock and station agency's retail shop. The Rowes are relative deer farming newbies who started buying in a few stags in 2021 to make use of the existing deer fenced area and yards on their sheep and beef farm inland from Taumaranui. They quickly got hooked and in July 2022 moved to the Ashurst farm bought from well-known local deer farmer Gary Moore. They run hinds and around 500 mixed-age velvet stags. "It's been a great move and change for us," Rowe says.



year-old Kelpie who over the years has been a surrogate mum to many baby animals at Stoney Oaks wildlife park. Her most recent charge was Delilah the orphan fallow, but over the years she's helped raise other fawns, lambs, kids (goat variety) and calves. Delilah had a rough start to life, explains Gail Simmons, co-owner of Stoney Oaks, and quickly bonded with Prim, who spontaneously started producing milk for the fawn. Unfortunately the story has a sad ending; Delilah, whose health was compromised when she came to Stoney Oaks, died recently. "We managed to cure most of her ill health with TLC and antibiotics, but she was still very small," Simmons says. "She was such a sweet soul and in her short life gave so much joy to everyone who met her." R.I.P Delilah.

Good in the hood

Helen Clarke, this year's Matuschka Award winner, epitomizes the unsung and unpaid work of volunteers across the land. Her nominators described her as the "glue" that held the Waipa DFA branch together. In predictably understated style, Clarke said she was happy to help out where needed. In her spare time she also volunteers at the Otorohanga Citizens Advice Bureau. According to volunteeringnz.org.nz, 21% of New Zealanders do volunteer work, undertaking 159 million hours of formal volunteer labour per year generating estimated value of \$4 billion. Interestingly, people who volunteer rate life as "more worthwhile" than those who do not volunteer. National Volunteer Week, from 16 – 22 June will be all but over when *Deer Industry News* hits mailboxes, but that's no excuse not to step up for a volunteer role in a DFA branch and/or local community. Find out more at deernz.org/nzdafa or volunteeringnz.org.nz



Lucky draw

At this year's deer industry conference, Matt Wade was the winner of the lucky draw gourmet meat pack supplied by the key conference sponsor Silver Fern Farms. It was his first time at a deer industry conference and a worthwhile event, he said. Wade and wife Elisha are dairy farmers who have added deer to their farming mix. Find out how they've gone about it and what they're learning along the way on Page 21.



Deer Vets

Camille Flack, the 2024 DINZ board observer, is also the incoming president of the Deer Branch of the New Zealand Veterinary Association. A key role of the branch is to encourage and support vets to develop deer specialist skills. Flack says communication with key stakeholders is an important role of the branch, and members met recently with DINZ and the NZDFA executive to renew and refresh communication channels. The Deer Branch has 352 members, of which 24 identify deer as a primary interest area. "Interestingly we have a similar membership level to what we had back in 1985, although its varied over that time," she says. The Deer Branch was founded in 1984 by Professor Peter Wilson, this year's Deer Industry Award winner (see page 11.)



Doggone cute

You gotta love this feel-good story about a super-motherly Kelpie canine. If you didn't catch it in *Taranaki Daily News* or on *1News*, the story was about Prim an eight-



BACK IN THE DAY

A flashback 25 years ago to *The Deer Farmer* July 1999 shows things were the same but different to nowadays. Same: the deer industry conference was held in Napier. Different: It was a three-and-a-half day affair, and the theme was 'Fresh Times'.

A 1999 conference highlight was the presentation of results from the Richmond/Wrightson Deer Performance Project led by Ian Walker, also at this year's conference. The goal of the Hawke's Bay project involving 12 monitor farms was to improve deer profitability by achieving set performance targets for venison and velvet. The July 1999 front page story was about the agreement in principle by GIB (predecessor to DINZ) and PPCS (now Silver Fern Farms) to a promotional strategy for NZ farmed venison in Europe.



Wallaby watch

Watch out for wallabies – they're on the rise according to Manaaki Whenua Landcare Research. There are more than one million wallabies in the wild, roughly one pest marsupial for every five NZers. There are two main populations in NZ, centred in



South Canterbury (Bennett's wallaby) and the Rotorua Lakes area (dama and parma wallabies). They're spreading further afield, however, if left unchecked MWLR predict they will spread to over one-third of the country within 50 years. Four Bennetts wallabies consume the drymatter equivalent of one stock unit per day, while it would take ten of the smaller parma and dama species to consume the same amount. Anecdotally farmers in wallaby-affected areas can lose upwards of 10 – 15% of crops and pasture annually, and the total gross economic impacts of the pest are predicted in 2025 to top \$28 million per annum. The Tipu Matoro National Wallaby Eradication programme set up in July 2020 is working towards elimination of the pest. In 2022/23, TMNWE funded \$8m of control operations covering 548,000ha. Immediate plans include a further \$5.8m spend on control operations and \$1million for operational research. ■

Deer Industry News

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Comms man Cam

Cam Frecklington stepped in to the newly created DINZ communication manager role in late April. He comes from a varied background in communications that includes journalism, strategic communications, advertising, and brand story-telling.

What attracted you to the role?

The nicheness was the initial attraction, along with the potential in Asia markets. I grew up on a farm, so am familiar with rural life and attitudes, but the deer industry was mostly an unknown for me. I thrive on curiosity, so I saw it as an interesting industry to get into. Also, New Zealand's role as a food producer in a changing world is an important story to tell.

What, in brief, is your job description?

To tell the deer industry's stories. To connect people, to educate and inform. To promote all the good work going on, both at DINZ and on farms or processing plants around the country. There is so much cool stuff happening but a lot of it flies under the radar. I want to change that.

What are your first impressions of the deer industry?

First and foremost, the passion of the people involved. Again, growing up on a farm and living in a rural community for much of my youth, I know already how passionate farmers are about their work, their land, their products. But the deer industry folks seem to take that passion a step further, and most I have talked to have been very welcoming and generous with offers to help or provide insight.

What were your rural connections prior to taking on this role?

I grew up on a sheep and beef farm just across the Rangitikei River from Hunterville, though I would probably consider Feilding my hometown, inasmuch as I have one. I spent many a Friday at the Feilding saleyards with my dad as a young fella.

One of your first deer industry events was this year's conference. What did you learn and what were the highlights?

For me, it was an incredibly valuable experience, especially for someone new to the industry. I was honestly just trying to take it all in, but the off-the-ball conversations, so to speak, had during the coffee breaks or over lunch and dinner, were invaluable. As someone who works in Wellington, hearing from the farmers and other industry players, listening to their thoughts on the industry, was so valuable.

DINZ understands you have lived and worked in Korea. What did you do there?

What did you do there?

I left New Zealand in 2001 after finishing at Lincoln. I was working night shifts in a seafood packing factory and just wanted to get out of New Zealand. While most headed for the UK for the traditional rite of passage OE, I wanted to do something different. I initially looked at teaching English in Japan but ultimately settled on South

Korea. I did three years in Gwangju (the culinary heart of South Korea) in the south before moving to Seoul for another three years.

You've also lived and worked in China. What did you do there?

I started as an English teacher, in the southern city of Guangzhou, about an hour or two by train to Hong Kong. But I wanted to get out of teaching, plus it was unbearably hot and humid in summer. I then moved to Beijing to attend the illustrious Tsinghua University and study business journalism, which started my communications-related career.

What's on your immediate to-do list at DINZ?

Where to start? I know folks are probably tired of hearing about strategy, but I'm looking at ways to better communicate on a regular basis, in a voice and tone that best represents the deer industry. This will involve everything from a renewed approach to social media, an underrated channel that can serve as a one-stop shop for deer industry commentary, to heading out onto farms and processing plants to capture the great work happening there, to media campaigns. A lot ahead at an exciting time, so getting a plan in place for that is critical. ■



Velvet access conversations ongoing

Constructive conversations between MPI and their counterparts in Beijing continue, with progress being made toward restoring market access for the upcoming 2024/25 season. DINZ is working closely with MPI and advocating for stakeholders, yet navigating China is complex and takes time.

DINZ was able to talk to the issue at the 10th annual China Business Summit 2024, held on May 20th in Auckland. DINZ was represented by DINZ board chair Mandy Bell and project manager Damon Paling. This prestigious event brought together key stakeholders from both New Zealand and China to encourage bilateral trade relationships and explore new market opportunities.

DINZ actively engaged in informal discussions advocating for the restoration of market access for frozen deer velvet for the upcoming season. The team chatted with several players, including Trade & Agriculture Minister Todd McClay, Parliamentarian Nancy Lu, New Zealand Trade & Enterprise, the New Zealand China Council and the New Zealand China Trade Association.

These conversations were instrumental in reinforcing DINZ’s commitment to meeting China’s regulatory standards and

underscored the industry’s dedication to maintaining strong, mutually beneficial trade partnerships. ■



ACTIVELY ENGAGED: DINZ board chair Mandy Bell and project manager Damon Paling, with NZTE trade commissioner Chris Metcalfe, are continuing conversations to restore market access for frozen deer velvet for the upcoming season.

Submission on emissions

DINZ continues to work with government and industry stakeholders on how to best address climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. This has involved input into developments and conversations around government policy, industry advocacy, the AgriZero fund, Scope 3/indirect emissions, and improved productivity.

DINZ, together with Beef + LambNZ, submitted on 31 May to the Climate Change Commission (CCC) on behalf of stakeholders. The submission was in response to CCC’s initial draft advice on three consultation documents:

- The fourth emissions budget (2036 – 2040)
- The 2050 emissions reduction target
- The inclusion of international shipping and aviation in the 2050 target

The submission highlighted that NZ farmers are world-leading, efficient producers of high-quality products. Right now, the only feasible way to reduce emissions behind the farm gate is to decrease animal numbers. The current emission targets, lack of mitigation tools, and the CCC’s recommendations threaten farmers’ ability to continue to produce food and sustainably farm into the future.

DINZ environmental stewardship manager Luka Jansen notes, “There are significant differences in our analysis and the commission’s analysis on emissions reductions. The commission’s current analysis and proposed settings, for example, vastly underestimate the impact of the proposed levels of afforestation they are recommending for our sector.”

The submission acknowledges that the sheep, beef and deer sectors have a role to play in reducing emissions and the warming of our atmosphere; the likely impacts from the CCC proposals, however, will have far-reaching consequences for farmers and will go beyond the farm gate. ■



DIFFERENT VIEWS: The red meat sector and Climate Change Commission have significant differences in the analysis of emissions reductions, DINZ environmental stewardship manager Luka Jansen says.

Conference 2024

The theme of this year's conference, held in the Napier War Memorial Centre, of 'Incredible legacy - the past, the present and the future' was well-executed with due respect to achievements of the past and aspirations for a vibrant deer farming future. The content, format and positive vibes were due to the combined efforts of the Hawke's Bay DFA and DINZ, backed by key sponsors: Silver Fern Farms, First Light Farms, FMG, OSPRI and Alliance.

Murray in the spotlight

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Murray Matuschka was conference 2024's man of the moment. A newly anointed life member of the NZDFA, he also took centre stage as the FMG-sponsored keynote speaker.

The 88-year-old said he was "happy with any mic" and never missed a beat, weaving his farming and deer-centric life amid a series of anecdotes, observations and occasional unfiltered jokes. The tales included how he came to foxtrot with his mother-in-law, why a man was wearing ladies knickers, and how a race day ended badly for a jockey called Grenville Hughes.

Matuschka said he still didn't know how to "tame" deer and after 54 years of farming them had come to the conclusion that deer didn't like him.

"Every time I drive through a paddock, they run the other way...I have this policy of feeding them well all the time, but they still don't like me."

His first close-up encounter with deer was when he was 14-years-old through the sights of a .22 rifle, shooting a two-year-old stag. The farming of deer followed several years later after buying 440 acres of browntop with no trees at Wairakei near Taupo, bankrolled in part by \$14,000 from seven years of sharemilking with wife Barbara. He got hooked on farming deer while helping out Rex Giles, owner of Rahana Station, the first licensed deer farm in New Zealand. Giles gave Matuschka 20 hinds and four rolls of netting on the condition that the hinds were sold five years later under Giles' name.

"They were worth nothing when we got them, but we sold them for \$5000 each five years later," he said.

The farm, eventually named Kitenui Deer Farm, was a blank canvas when they moved there, but the couple developed a deer



LIVING LEGEND: Matuschka's deer-related wide-ranging contributions to the industry have spanned more than 50 years.



LIVING LEGEND: Matuschka's deer-related wide-ranging contributions to the industry have spanned more than 50 years.

farm and safari park/ tourism business running at one time a menagerie of exotic animals including zebra, American bison, sika, samba, fallow deer and Himalayan tahr. People from all over the world came to visit, and it was a source of great satisfaction and pride, he said.

In addition to farming deer, Matuschka had captured them creatively, crafting life-sized concrete and brass sculptures for clients throughout the country. He had many dear deer friends, in particular Bob Swann, who was among the conference crowd.

Himalayan tahr were another favourite animal for Matuschka. In 1978 he got a permit to farm an unlimited number of them in the North Island. He took four deer weaners south to Brian Bassett-Smith in South Canterbury in exchange for four tahr, which formed the basis of a herd he grew to 60, but nowadays held at around 15 to 20. At one stage the Department of Conservation had threatened to shoot the tahr, claiming they were illegally farmed, but Barbara saved the day by producing the permission-to-farm permit issued several years before. Nowadays the bulls produced trophy heads of about 15 to 16 inches, a source of great pride for Matuschka.

"I've come to the conclusion after 54 years of farming deer that they just don't like me."

His lasting legacy is the Matuschka Award, established in 1996, to celebrate grassroots battlers who had done their bit for the deer industry. At the conference, Matuschka presented the award to Helen Clarke and later made it known that on his death, close friend and Waikato branch DFA member Barry Mackintosh (and the 2022 award recipient) will oversee judging of the award. ■

Nimbleness needed for future success

Ali Spencer *Deer Industry News* writer

Setting up smaller marketing niches, or 'value chains', being nimbler and targeting winners will be essential for future success, answers from the Q&A session suggested.

DINZ board vice-chair and First Light Foods group managing director Gerard Hickey felt the above, in the long-term, "will return more than the schedule."

The recent strategic and restructuring activity for DINZ was responding in part to the fall in deer numbers in recent years, commented board chair Mandy Bell.



Q&A: DINZ board members take questions from the floor.

Responding to a question from Southland deer farmer John Somerville, she noted in the nine years from 2017 to the year-ending 30 June 2023, Statistics NZ data showed the New Zealand deer herd had fallen by 11.2 percent, compared to similar decreases for dairy cattle (9.9 percent) and sheep (11.5 percent), while beef cattle had risen slightly (1.1 percent). Hind retention for herd rebuilding is expected to impact further on numbers ahead, she added.

"We've made some strong, focused decisions," that, she felt, "will hold us in good stead."

NZDFA is "very focused on getting deer back behind fences," said NZDFA executive committee chair Mark McCoard when summarising the day.

For food sector service companies like venison marketer Duncan NZ, it's not only about supply, but also keeping skilled staff employed year-round, said general manager marketing and operations Rob Kidd in the exporters panel.

Duncan NZ is "right-sizing" its production teams and has started to process some feral wild deer "as a needs-must situation," he said.

"With respect to the feral deer, we'll do what we need to do to get the product in, maintain our team and move the product. But we're not about to take away resources from our farmed venison

operations or marketing. They remain our bread and butter."

He expects one to three years "of having to navigate that challenge, until we see more farmed animals coming through."

Agreeing with that time-frame, Alliance Group sales manager Terry O'Connell added: "We've just got to be really focused on that channel direction."

Alliance's view is, "We've already got customer selection and channel selection mapped out, and we'll be targeting where the winners are," he said. ■

"Pretty positive" outlook for venison

Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

There's a "pretty positive outlook [for venison], especially given the well-documented challenges facing the sheep and beef sector," Alliance Group general manager for livestock and shareholders Murray Behrent shared with conference-goers over lunch.

Referring to the pandemic and its logistical challenges, he noted, "Venison has proved resilient and is emerging from that generally in better shape than other red meats."

Alliance, a conference Premium sponsor, is expecting consistent demand from Europe this year, "particularly for chilled venison, and, in the face of lower hind numbers, we are working with our farmers to help ensure we can continue to meet customer expectations," he said.

Behrent's positive message has been backed up by plenty of re-positioning work by the five venison marketers.

Speaking during the marketing panel session during conference, Silver Fern Farms general manager sales and marketing Dave Courtney noted while farmgate prices are not where deer farmers might want, venison's, "stability should be noted in this current market."

That stability has come from a different market mix, "less [venison] into Europe, more into the US and then the opening up of China," which "means you're not as exposed to the conditions in one market," he said.

Another part has been changing New Zealand venison's sales channel mix to include retail, especially in the US. That has helped to hold venison prices, "steadier on the retail shelf," he said.



RESILIENT: Venison has emerged better than other red meats post-Covid, Murray Behrent said.

The US market was going well, but cost-of-living challenges were still impacting the demand for venison in high-end restaurants, so foodservice remains subdued, Courtney noted.

Duncan NZ general manager market and operations Rob Kidd agreed, relating a recent story from a restaurateur who said while he can get customers into his restaurants, he “can’t get them to buy a second bottle of wine.”

Panel discussion showed consumer confidence for red meat generally is still being impacted by the continuing cost-of-living crisis globally, various conflicts, including Ukraine and the Middle East, and elections affecting half the world’s population this year, and several of New Zealand venison’s markets.

In addition, Kidd noted the perennial competition that European wild venison poses. The region will continue to be an important market for New Zealand venison, “particularly for leg meat”, he said.

"I think we're in a stable environment. The only way is upwards, but it's all about channel management."

Asked whether the venison price was going to “fall off the cliff,” similar to sheepmeat, Alliance Group sales manager Terry O’Connell said he was confident, as a “very niche product”, venison would not.

The “significant market correction for lamb” had been caused partly by a glut of sheepmeat out of Australia, “who are now operating in the same markets we do,” he explained. Also, Chinese consumers eat sheepmeat “predominantly outside the household in China ... [and] when people get stressed, they stop spending,” he said.

“I think we’re in a stable environment. The only way is upwards, but it’s all about channel management. What we do in the US is critical,” O’Connell believes.

With the current instability between Hong Kong and China, another issue exercising exporters’ minds is how demand will fare for some of the co-products and offals items, given that political climate. Items such as bones, sinews, tendons and pizzles, among others, are normally seen in the traditional Chinese medicine markets so tensions in the region may have a bearing on demand.

Petfood returns are strengthening as the sector recovers after the bubble burst in the early 2020s for the main items of bones and offal, he explained. Buyers are now starting to cast around again for a novel protein.

“That’s exciting to see but it’s at a very low buy price, just so they can get some confidence back. We just need to keep supporting that and be patient.”

Even though a big portion of the co-products and offals are taken off before a carcass weight is generated, all are of value. They contribute to the market value and the final farmgate price back to the deer farmer, explained First Light Food’s general manager venison Matt Gibson. ■

Value chain focus is the future for velvet

Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

The future of the velvet industry lies in sorting out the value chain, noted DINZ interim CEO and markets manager Rhys Griffiths.



SORT IT: A smooth velvet industry future depends on ironing out the value chain, Rhys Griffiths said.

“Profitability on-farm has to grow... and there has to be fair distribution back to you guys as well,” he said.

Some of the big overseas traders profit from instability but others – healthy food companies and some traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) companies also – prefer stability, Griffiths explained.

Referencing a chart demonstrating the number of hands involved in the supply chain before the velvet gets to the Asian consumer, Griffiths said the food company or TCM pharmacy can currently buy from the wholesaler, processor or importer, as well as the exporter. Around half the product also goes to China for processing and re-exporting to Korea.

“The more indirect, or complex, the supply chain, the more chance for a deterioration in quality assurance or authenticity, which then destroys the value we’re working so hard to achieve,” he said.

The question industry should be asking is, “Is the next person in the chain adding value or are they taking value away?”

“Direct and transparent supply chains, where there can be some involvement of highlighting the producer story (to the consumer), will create more value,” he believes. Looking beyond the current China access issue for frozen velvet (see page 7), velvet’s growth in export value and volume – tripling in value to around \$120 million today and more than doubling in volume to 1,100 tonnes – is “a real success story for the deer industry,” Griffiths reported.

“We’ve taken it from a commodity, TCM product to the healthy food market,” he said. “The next iteration will be the healthy functional food market.”

In Korea, four healthy functional food (HFF) companies are working already on science-backed health claims, which is

“significant as it potentially will give us international exposure,” Griffiths said.

In addition, Beijing Tong Ren Tang is the first Chinese HFF company to recently launch a new velvet extract product, and promote its 'New Zealandness'. ■

A MENTOR TO MANY

Professor Peter Wilson was an overdue recipient of the Deer Industry Award. The retired Massey University-based veterinary science lecturer and researcher had supported the industry at many levels during his 40-plus years involvement. He led the establishment of Massey's deer veterinary science teaching and research programmes and deer research farm, and has mentored many vets



over the years. He was also a source of factual information to deer farmers, including Deer Industry Award judge Steve Borland, who recalls an invaluable Wilson-led workshop he attended when starting out with deer. Supporting nomination comments said that Wilson had a fiercely pragmatic and science-backed style of engagement which was sometimes misunderstood but always sought the best outcome for farmed deer and the collective industry. In accepting the award, Wilson paid tribute to the vets and researchers he had worked with to achieve milestones and breakthroughs.

Drying velvet in NZ a vision, but there are obstacles

Drying velvet here in New Zealand to add value is a vision for the DINZ board, but it's not as simple as it may seem, board member Tony Cochrane explained in the exporters panel following Griffiths' presentation.

Adding value, will “create more wealth for ourselves,” and the brand can be followed right through to market, he said. Currently, however, “China can process velvet for half the cost of New Zealand”.

Another obstacle is that China's TCM rules call for a moisture content of under 13 percent. “That's really dry on top of 10 plus hot water dippings,” he noted.

It's a costly and time-consuming process and would require investment, he said. New Zealand factories currently hold 10-15 tonnes a month and “time is money” when velvet is seasonally consumed in the Northern Hemisphere autumn, from September to October, “and we are trying to sell new season's velvet”.

In addition, Chinese processors are “unlikely to lie down,” Cochrane thinks. They could continue to process for other Asian countries where they can do it economically as well.

Sorting out the value chain might also help exporters with more solid demand away from wholesale markets, enabling earlier farmgate price indications in the future.

PGG Wrightson, for example, tries, “to come up with a minimum price contract as early as we can to try and build on price stability,” he said. However, the current seasonal consumption patterns, plus getting payment from customers in time as the tonnage increases, makes forecasting difficult.

Supporting “those who have invested in the velvet industry – not the fly-by-nighters – and working together with farmer suppliers as well, is going to bode well for the future,” Cochrane said.



MEET THE BOARD AND DINZ STAFF - NELSON

Deer Industry New Zealand invites deer farmers and interested industry people to discuss current industry issues, trends and prospects followed by a light meal cooked by Chef Graham Brown.

**Fairfield House, 48 Van Diemen Street, Nelson
Wednesday 17th July 2024, 5:00pm - 8:00pm**

To register, visit the DINZ website: deernz.org/events



NZDFA Executive Committee: Chair Mark McCoard, Justin Stevens, Karen Middelberg, Evan Potter

NZDFA AGM - Another challenging season

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Despite the inclusion of four remits, the 49th Annual General Meeting of the New Zealand Deer Farmers Association (NZDFA) was completed within an hour.

The meeting, attended by 46 delegates, commenced with a moment of silence in memory of three life members (Sir Tim Wallis, Murray Powell, Don Gregson) and Central Regions branch member Bruce Niven.

Chair Justin Stevens' report highlighted several achievements despite another challenging year. He mentioned a successful June meeting with NZ Police to address the growing issue of unlawful hunting, as well as a sell-out Next Generation event in Ashburton. Another achievement was progress with the Taihape/Ruapehu branch's remit on venison co-products being backed by research on extracting and maximising the value of co-products from sheep, cattle and deer. Two lower South Island roadshow meetings to update farmers on industry happenings and hear farmer concerns were well attended. Issues highlighted were the government mandated freshwater farm plans and the increase in farm input costs over the last three years, which would likely impact production output over the coming years.

Stevens said he was disappointed that the velvet season had started with lower prices than the previous year given the development and sales growth of health food supplements in Korea. However, he was pleased that venison prices had increased and peaked above \$10/kg, which had made a big difference to deer farmers. He also noted the new appointments of John Somerville (Southland) to the NVSB, replacing Peter Allan (Southland) who had served in the role for 13 years. Richard Hilson (Hawke's Bay) and Danette McKeown (SCNO) were appointed to the Research Advisory Panel, a new group formed as part of the new science and research framework. Also, Craig North (Southland) was appointed to the OSPRI stakeholders council.

In concluding the meeting, Stevens paid tribute to outgoing executive committee member Jamie Ward (Otago) and outgoing SAP member Graham Peck (SCNO).

Financial highlights

Karen Middelberg presented the 2023 – 2024 financial report (posted on deernz.org/nzdfa) which included a Statement of Financial Performance and a draft budget for 2024/2025 which noted:

- An operating deficit of \$2020 before tax, resulting in a net deficit for the year of \$4542
- An almost 50 percent in interest income from \$6245 to \$12,103
- Less overall expenditure (\$127,908 vs \$141,163) due to decreased costs of travel, accommodation, printing and stationery, and reduced costs related to grant funding and conference.

The tabled 2024/25 budget assumed the same membership (1097) as 2023/24 and forecast income of \$132,000. Projected expenses included a \$7000 increase in honoraria payments to \$43,000 and an estimated \$3,100 increase in election expenditure for the use of electionnz.com for committee and SAP elections.

Four remits were presented, with all unanimously supported after discussion in which the honorarium for the NZDFA chair in Remit 2 was amended from \$13,000 to \$14,000:

1. That life membership for Murray Matuschka is confirmed and endorsed. Nominator: Bob Swann (life member) Seconded: Ian Bristow
2. That honoraria be increased to \$13,000 p.a. for the NZDFA chair and \$10,000 p.a. for executive committee members. Nominator: Grant Hasse (NZEWS) Seconder: Sean de Lacy (Taihape/Ruapehu)
3. That NAIT take proactive measures to rectify the shortcomings of the animal registration system to restore confidence among farmers. Nominator: Mark Tapley (SCNO) Seconder: Graham Peck (SCNO)
4. That the NZDFA Executive Committee request the DINZ Board to publicly explain the reasons for the deteriorating deer research relationship with AgResearch and the DINZ plan to ensure a sustainable future in deer specific research. Nominator: John Somerville (Southland) Seconder: Tony Roberts (Southland)

There was discussion about NAIT failure with Mark Tapley reiterating that OSPRI stakeholder representative Craig North was the first port of call for any NAIT animal registration concerns. Graham Peck acknowledged the role that Tapley had played in proving to NAIT the failure of the animal registration system.

John Somerville summarised the Southland DFA's concerns about the deteriorating DINZ-AgResearch deer research relationship. He said the lack of transparency and communication from DINZ about the restructuring of R&D delivery was the issue and that clarity from DINZ about the future AgResearch-DINZ relationship was needed.

NZDFA executive team changes

Mark McCoard replaced outgoing chair Justin Stevens. Evan Potter (Hawke's Bay) stepped into the vacancy created by departing member Jamie Ward. The 2024/25 executive team is Mark McCoard, Karen Middelberg, Justin Stevens and Evan Potter.

DINZ board candidates

Delegates heard from the two candidates standing for the one producer position on the DINZ Board. Mandy Bell addressed the meeting while a statement from the second candidate John Tacon was read by Grant Charteris. They would be interviewed by the Selections and Appointments Panel on June 13 and an announcement made later that month. ■

Get more hinds behind fences

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

New NZDFA chair Mark McCoard's number one priority is to get more deer, especially hinds, back behind fences.

"We're losing breeding hinds, and we want to change that so we can maintain critical mass," he says.

The NZDFA executive is keen to attract sheep and beef farmers with existing deer infrastructure.

"The sheep industry is struggling, and we see this as an ideal opportunity. I think we have about a two year window to capitalize on that."

"We're losing breeding hinds, and we want to change that so we can maintain critical mass."

He believes that maintaining volume in the venison market is not purely a numbers game. There is an opportunity to plug any venison supply gaps by growing out younger deer beyond 85kgCW. Typically schedule prices dipped beyond this weight range but the NZDFA is working with processors and marketers to change this.

"Over the last five years the number of young velvet stags sent for slaughter has tripled. The number of younger venison animals has halved but their weights have increased reflecting better genetics. We feel that there's a real opportunity to alter weight breaks for these heavier animals by growing them out for longer and developing products."

Another NZDFA focus was to encourage the uptake of leadership development of younger DFA branch members.

"We want to create a pathway for leadership development and have a budget for this. It's critically important we have the deer farmer voice and representation where it matters." ■

Mark McCoard, NZDFA Executive Chair | m.mccoard@hotmail.com



GET IN BEHIND: We want to get more deer behind fences, NZDFA chair Mark McCoard says.

More deer at Mangaweka

Mark McCoard is walking the talk of increasing deer numbers. On the family's farm at Mangaweka, east of Taihape, more deer fencing is on the cards for the introduction of an as yet undecided "venison element".

"We can get summer-dry so having venison as well as velvet will give us flexibility, and there's also the other advantages from having a multi-species system," he says.

McCoard and wife Louise farm 2500 stock units on 250ha of flat-to-rolling and high hill country. They run 200 velvet stags, breeding hinds along with 1000 breeding ewes and finish beef heifers. The farm is comfortably managed by one person and McCoard wants to keep it that way. For that reason he'll cap the velvet stag herd at about 250, drop ewe numbers and introduce some venison finishing on the lower lying country.

"The hill country is ideal for hinds, but it's too difficult to fence so we'll push the ewes back there so we can do something with venison on the more intensive country."

Adding more deer will keep the workload manageable for him, and also the McCoard's son and daughter, both of whom are employed in agri-allied jobs but could return to the home farm in the future. The McCoards are undecided on whether to buy more land to take the farmed area to around 400ha.

"We've considered it but it's family dependent."

Award winning and picture-perfect

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Ticking off NZFAP Plus certification is more supporting evidence of the Burdon family's commitment to building an all-round sustainable farming business. The eight-month exercise was costly and time consuming, but Richard Burdon says having it in place will make life easier.

"We're a busy farming property with a lot of staff. I wanted to get a recognised and accredited farm environment plan and supporting systems in place so we can be confident and clear on what we're doing and where we're heading," Burdon said.

NZFAP Plus is one of several examples Richard and wife Sarah have hooked into over the last decade to validate the values and processes underpinning their integrated farming business.

At the deer industry field day late last year to celebrate Glen Dene's Deer Farm Environmental Award, the couple spoke about their achievements and aspirations. Sarah noted it was an ongoing journey.

"There's been a lot of development at Glen Dene over 40 years. This win is a celebration of what has been achieved, but we still have a long way to go."

Richard said his family had a passion for the land and were doing their best to balance best farm management practices with value-add opportunities to diversify and future-proof the business. The field day crowd got to view and learn about some of the value-add diversifications which included The Camp, a camping ground business with Sustainable Qualmark Gold accreditation, hunting, and carbon forestry.

There was plenty of evidence of how the Burdons were balancing financial and environmental sustainability. Glen Dene's environmental objectives fall under the broad banners of nutrient management (using nutrients efficiently, minimising and ensuring that any nutrient losses do not exceed limits); irrigation management (ensuring the amount and timing of irrigation is managed to meet plant demands and to minimise leaching and run-off); soil management (maintaining or improving soil structure to minimise the movement of sediment, phosphorous and other contaminants into waterways); and water body management. Riparian plantings along with wetlands played an important part of waterbody management by trapping sediments and filtering contaminants. At a field day stop-off, the crowd saw the early stages of a development to enhance an existing three hectare natural wetland to filter sediment and contaminants before entering a farm stream.

Income from carbon credits and hunting had helped fund the environmental initiatives. The Burdons were among the first farmers to opt in to the carbon credit market, joining the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) in 2010. It was a bold move into an unknown market, but it paid off with cashed-in carbon credits generating around \$1 million. Richard said that cashing in credits

to top up farm income, however, was not the prime motivation for joining the scheme, which now includes 78ha of forestry at Glen Dene and 49ha at Longridge.

"At the time carbon was about \$6 to \$8/tonne so the potential returns were low, but we joined up for other reasons. We're farmers, conservationists and agri-tourism operators, and we could see that joining the ETS aligned with our own goals and values and each enterprise."

At a glance: Glen Dene Station

- Richard, Sarah, Georgie (21), in her final year of an Applied Sciences degree, and Charlie (19), who is gaining hands-on farming experience in the North Island.
- Fourth generation family-owned integrated high-country business comprising sheep, beef, deer breeding and finishing plus game hunting and camping ground businesses.
- Glen Dene (3000ha) encompassing most of the land between Lake Hawea on the east, Lake Wanaka on the west, and the Neck to the north plus lease of the neighbouring 3000ha Mt Isthmus Station .
- The wider farming business includes Longridge, a 430ha South Otago sheep, beef, deer farm; and Kerin, a 209ha Hawea flat lease block. Collectively the business farms 3677 deer, 735 cattle, 4921 sheep, with income from each stock class contributing one-third each of total farm income.



TEAM EFFORT: Richard, Sarah and Georgie with some of the Glen Dene management team who have been key players in growing a sustainable farm business.

The carbon forestry side of the Glen Dene business has evolved to include input from CarbonCrop, which has verified using artificial intelligence 272 tonnes of sequestered carbon from the 380ha of native forest ineligible for the ETS.

The hunting business started in 2012. The hunting estate encompasses Glen Dene's undeveloped hill and alpine country, over which home-bred stags are free-ranged for the mostly North American clientele. The seed of this diversification was planted by friend Bobby Hill, the owner of Makarora River Ranch hunting business, Burdon explained.

"He told me that the money to be made from recreation would always outstrip that from farming, and it took me a few years to realise that."

As well as professional guides, Glen Dene has an in-house taxidermist who spends about 25 hours to skin, salt and turn a head, before drying and dispatching to clients.

Richard enjoys the hunting side of the business and is a trustee of the Hunters for Conservation New Zealand Trust. The trust objectives are to promote and enhance the interests of hunters protect hunting areas and raise the public perception of hunters, by highlighting the positive contributions they make to NZ by managing game animal populations.

Glen Dene's deer breeding programme has a stag focus, with the genetics used selected on style.

"It's not about the points. It's about the length of the tyne and wide heads."

The R2 and mixed-age hinds are run in an easy-care hill-based system. About 150 of the hinds are AI mated to selected hunting-type sires. The hinds are post-rut weaned and the stag fawns trucked to Longridge where they are grown out and fed behind 220 hectares of deer fencing.

Collectively deer contribute about one-third of farm income and have been part of the system since 1979. They started out on the lake side of the main road, and in the 1990s were shifted to the hill country, eventually ousting the Merino flock in 2010. Although the breeding of stags is important, Richard is mindful of maintaining a production balance.

"Venison production is still an important part of the deer operation, so we don't want to sacrifice growth and body weight attributes. We want to keep the velvet/venison/hunting mix and add value where we can."

Farming in a fish bowl

Glen Dene's picture-perfect environment, accessibility and location has been a huge plus for the development of the camping and hunting businesses. But farming deer, sheep and cattle alongside a popular tourist route deemed a significant natural landscape brings with it regulation, including the Queenstown Lakes District Council's District Plan, which Richard says is restricting farm innovation. Under the plan, on-farm developments, such as the building of worker accommodation and new farm sheds are restricted, putting at risk Glen Dene's freshwater management focus and plan to integrate tourism with food forests, livestock, and wetlands. However, the Burdons have been proactive in addressing such regulatory challenges and

Wai Wanaka

Glen Dene's NZFAP Plus certification process had been supported by Wai Wanaka, an Upper Clutha catchment rural and urban water quality and management action group. WaiWanaka has helped establish six rural catchment, four small landholder, and three urban catchment groups which they have supported by coordinating and facilitating environmental-related education and funding. Richard said the support from WaiWanaka for the Hawea catchment group he belonged to had been invaluable in helping Glen Dene achieve NZFAP Plus certification.

Richard and Sarah's daughter Georgie completed a summer internship with Wai Wanaka and assisting with NZFAP Plus, which included developing farm environment plans for nutrient and greenhouse gas management, biodiversity monitoring, and diversification projects. She gained a lot from the experience.

"I learned how legislation is impacting farmers time and taking them away from the actual business of farming."

Georgie, in her final year of a Bachelor of Applied Science in agricultural innovation and environmental management at Otago University, says her experience with WaiWanaka has encouraged her to pursue a career supporting farmers to navigate the broad topic of environmental compliance and policy.



RED STAGS: The breeding of stags is important, but Richard is mindful of maintaining venison production attributes in the Glen Dene herd.



PICTURE-PERFECT: The crowd at last year's field day enjoyed the stunning landscape. Glen Dene's location and significant natural landscape classification was a plus but also a negative due to the restrictive regulations around farm developments under the local council's district plan.



BIG VIEWS: The view from Glen Dene's hill country extends the length of Lake Hawea.



JUST REWARD: Sarah and Richard Burdon with DINZ board chair Mandy Bell and MPI extension services lead Janet Gregory.

changes through strategic planning and investment in technology. A good example is the move from desktop and paper farm plans for the respective Glen Dene, Longridge and Kerin farms to a single, digitalised and integrated farm plan. The process, led by digital farm planning specialists My Enviro, was spread over two years and created a "living" whole-farm map for each farm. At the field day, MyEnviro's Toni Cottle said the process uncovered "gaps" in relation to the imminent intensive winter grazing regulations. The need to plug those gaps hit home in winter 2022 when a flyover by the Otago Regional Council identified Glen Dene paddocks that would need consent under the new regulations. My Enviro helped with the consenting process by gathering more data and information from the three farms, including the stock grazed, the paddocks used and their proximity to waterways. It took a couple of months, but the end result was a global seven year consent covering the three properties. The process had been a substantial financial investment but would save Glen Dene managers time and the approximate \$2000 annual cost for a consent. With the overall grazing plan now in place, all that was required for yearly approval was proof on the MyEnviro platform through identification on the digital maps and supporting information that winter crops met global consent conditions.

Keeping up with rapidly changing environmental regulations is difficult, and the Burdons were considering contracting employment of an environmental compliance specialist.

In summary, Richard said sustainability at Glen Dene would always be a work-in-progress, but they were confident the business was well placed for the fourth generation, Georgie and Charlie.

"We're in a cool space and excited for the future." ■

Plan it

Environmental Award judge and MPI extension services lead Janet Gregory had good general advice about how to approach wetland development. She said it was important to get an understanding of the existing or planned wetland area in context to the surrounding environment, as well as livestock movements in and around the area. Use this information to devise a plan and budget before proceeding, she said.

"It takes time but will save you money in the long run."

A plan was a great reference point for pursuing possible funding avenues – several regional councils offered enhancement grants - and would identify how to stage the development to fit within budget.



PLAN IT: MPI's Janet Gregory said getting a plan and budget before starting a wetland would save money.

High achievers at High Peak

Lynda Gray *Deer Industry News* editor

An intergenerational farm business with a clear vision based on trust, integrity and communication was the lasting impression of DINZ industry capability manager John Ladley following a field day at High Peak Station near Darfield.

Ladley was one of about 220 attending the day in early May celebrating High Peak's multiple category wins in the Canterbury Ballance Environmental Farm Awards.

"It was obvious to me that the Guild and Dunbar families are prepared to compromise on individual components for the greater good of the wider farming business," Ladley said.

"They see compromise as an opportunity and take the view that 'where there is a will there is a way forward'."

A good example of how this thinking had worked was during Covid when the borders closed and brought High Peak's tourism and hunting enterprises to a standstill, and income reliance turned to the pastoral side of the business.

"We take the view that none of us has the right to run their business over and above anyone else's," Simon Guild explained.

Simon is one of the four families who manage and run High Peak in a partnership comprising his siblings (Hamish and Amelia) and their respective partners, and parents James and Anna.

The field day crowd heard how the 3760ha high country station has diversified from traditional farm roots to a resilient tourism/hunting, pastoral, and beekeeping business. Tourism and hunting generate half of the of income and are managed by Simon who oversees 100 – 120 hunters each season. The 2000ha game estate's deer population include a mix of resident and home-bred animals. High Peak's antler genetics are focused on breeding a clean, classic, sizeable head, Simon said.

"It's not about the ultimate score and heaviest weight. We want something that is aesthetically pleasing, looks great and behaves in a natural manner."

Deer were introduced to High Peak after a devastating storm blitzed half of the sheep flock and about 25 percent of the cattle herd soon after James and Anna moved to the Canterbury station at the head of the Selwyn River in 1973. Hamish Guild explained that nowadays deer breeding, stags transferred to the hunting system and velvet accounted for about half the livestock income; sheep 30%, and cattle 20%. Deer were an excellent fit at High Peak. He likes farming them and envisaged that they would remain part of the system unless influences beyond his control such as regulation made change necessary.

High Peak was a challenging environment for livestock due to long cold winters, a slow spring start, extreme temperatures, nor-westerly winds, and the flood-prone Selwyn River. He worked within the confines of the environment to optimise production; through use of moisture-efficient pasture species, such as tall fescue and lucerne, as well as water storage dams for back-up support through pinch periods such as autumn for the growing

out of young stock. Less than three percent of High Peak was irrigated with a mix of pivot, hard-hose and k-line. Hamish said that intensifying production on a small area had created the opportunity to destock and protect the almost eight percent of fragile areas under QE2 covenants.

James Guild, a 2017 Queen's Birthday Honours recipient for his 40 years' service to the deer industry, a former NZDFA chair and GIB (the predecessor to DINZ) producer appointee, said he couldn't have predicted what would be achieved when he and wife Anna took on High Peak 50 years ago. He noted how his thinking had evolved from a single focus of increasing production to a triple bottom line of profitability, biodiversity and aesthetics.

In comments supporting High Peak's win, the judges noted the families guardianship of the land and ongoing efforts to promote and enact environmental stewardship and sustainable farming practices.

"Their objective is to enhance the land and leave it in a better state for the next generation to farm. The family members have diverse skill sets and work in harmony with each other to provide a sustainable and robust business." ■



TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE: James Guild said that his farming thinking had changed over 50 years from a single production focus to a three-way emphasis of profitability, biodiversity and aesthetics.



STUNNING & SUSTAINABLE: A view of the deer farm. Ballance Environmental Award judges commended the High Peak team's environmental stewardship and sustainable farming practices.

The Rangimoe legacy

An incredible legacy was the theme of this year's deer industry conference and perfectly captured in the Gaddum family's farming story at Rangimoe Station. The fourth generation and field day hosts Ru and wife Kate, with input from Ru's father Ben, explained the past, present and future aspirations for the deer dominant enterprise.



Rangimoe Station

- Ru and Kate Gaddum, with children Lucia (8) and Bruno (6)
- 920ha (860ha effective) at Kereru, west of Napier, Hawke's Bay
- Hill country ranging from 380 – 680 masl
- Breeding and finishing venison, beef and lamb plus velvet production
- 8800 stock units: Deer - 5619, Cattle - 2100, Sheep - 1081

In the beginning

Ben Gaddum set the scene, explaining the family's farming connections in the district started in the mid-1940s with his father Dick, who was born and raised on a farm at Mohaka, in the northern Hawke's Bay. However, on return from WW2 and eligible for land and a loan under the soldier settlement scheme, Dick set his farming sights on scrub-covered hill country in Kereru, pointed out by the manager of a station in the district and family friend Percy Burbury. The scrub-covered country – eventually Rangimoe – was overrun by rabbits and written off as viable for farming. But Percy believed it was worth a crack and went with Dick to Wellington to persuade the Ministry of Agriculture to grant a three year, free-of-charge lease to start taming the 1200 acres (485ha) of towering scrub, manuka, and moss and fern hilltop country. Dick, in his early 20s, rode in on a horse and pitched a five-by-six metre canvas tent alongside a spring, which became his home base for three years.

Dick and his parents used slashers in a first attempt to tackle the scrub. It was soul-destroying work, even more so after six weeks

when the trio had knocked out a paltry six acres. His parents walked away, and Dick was about to follow but pushback from his mother led to his buying of a new weapon for mass scrub destruction – a Fordson tractor with steel wheels. The mechanised bush-basher made inroads, clearing the way for basic subdivision. More land was brought into production when another family friend stepped in to underwrite the purchase of a bulldozer with discs to knock back larger areas of scrub. By this time, Dick had married, built a permanent home from farm-milled timber and, along with wife Ann, was raising three children – Ben, Richard and Margo. Over the next three decades, Dick continued to develop Rangimoe, increasing the foothold to 3440 ha (8500 acres) and acquiring more land in and around the district.

"It has been a huge decision for Dad to step back after a lifetime of working on the land to let us have a go. I know how much he misses it, but at the same time he's happy to see it running the way it is."

"He was very much about making life a lot better for his family and leaving his children a freehold farm, but the stress of losing it all worried him into an early grave," Ben Gaddum said.

"He lived an amazing life and what he achieved through his tenacity and drive will be remembered. That's the legacy that Dick left us as a family, and we're so incredibly lucky."

When Dick died in 1994, Rangimoe was farmed by Ben's brother Richard. Ben farmed Tuapae Station next door and in 1996 he bought Rangimoe. It had no deer fences, but it wasn't long before Ben, a deer farmer since the mid-1980s, had deer fenced 467ha.

Rangimoe, he said, was ideal deer country because it was summer-safe and had the right balance of hill and lower lying paddock country for successful venison and velvet breeding.

Deer had been crucial in setting up himself and the next generation.

"When I started farming, my father gave me 1000 ewes and 50 cows to get going, and I finished with 5500 deer and 1000 cattle and this place (Rangimoe) and a couple more farms, all on the back of deer. I'm grateful that I made that choice and stuck with them. Even when the schedule got down to \$4 a kilo, they were still better than bending over a sheep."

Deer dominant enterprise

Deer are dominant at Rangimoe, accounting for almost 65 percent of the 8800 stock units. It is an integrated breeding, velvet and

finishing system, and the engine room is a 900 breeding hind herd (incl 142 R2s), split into a 570 Forest Road and Forester-based velvet herd, and a 430 Maranoa and Wilkins-based venison herd.

Velvet production had been a big focus over the last seven years, driven by the stable prices. Presently velvet replacements must cut 2.8kg at two-years, but that's increasing to 3kg and at the same time herd size will grow to around 450.

The increase in velvet stags and improved genetics had increased velvet production over the last seven years from 1 tonne to 3.1 tonnes.

"We're at the point we should be using DNA testing as a basis for selection. It's an opportunity to ramp up production and something we haven't explored," Ru Gaddum said.

The velvet stags are spread out, with plenty of space on the hill blocks over autumn and during winter are break-fed on 20ha of kale and swedes. After button drop, they rotate around saved pastures on the lower lying hill country. When the velvet stags move from the hill to winter crop, about 70 percent of breeding hinds replace them on the hill, grazing the pasture by-passed by the stags during the roar. The remaining hinds are wintered on pit silage cut on-farm during spring. After winter, they head back to the hills.

Weaner winter management has changed in recent years, moving from the flats and crop to the developed pastures of the northern lying hill country.

"I needed the winter crop for the velvet stags, and I'd come to the conclusion that locking the weaners onto crop and feeding them silage caused stress."



RIDGELINE VIEW: Rangimoe is typical Hawke's Bay hill country ideal for deer.

Ripper riparian project

The Gaddums are in the final stages of a three year riparian planting exercise in conjunction with a Northern Ruahine catchment biodiversity recovery group. They have worked in partnership with Mauri Oho, a group supported and funded by



WIN-WIN: Ru and Mauri Oho's Erana Motu said the three year planting project has been a mutually beneficial partnership.

Maori trust landowners and the Department of Conservation. The goals of Mauri Oho are two-fold: to regenerate birdlife through trapping and native plantings; and support/upskill the young people who work within the programme. Mauri Oho's Erana Motu said that the guiding values of her group, to rejuvenate the life force of the land, aligned with the Gaddums' and that had made for a successful partnership. Ru and Kate surrendered 11ha of waterway margins, provided accommodation for Mauri Oho's workers and contributed 40% of the fencing costs. The payback was 34,000 bird-attracting native plants spread over eight kilometres. The planting and fencing were an important starting point for efficient subdivision. Kate said that the relationship with Mauri Oho was about more than planting out waterways. The aesthetic value for future generations was priceless as was the connections built with the people who had worked with them over the three years. she said they are gearing up for a final winter of planting.

"It's been really rewarding, and we hope that Mauri Oho will continue to visit."



DIG THIS: The Gaddums in partnership with Mauri Oho planted eight kilometres of native shrubs and trees alongside waterways.

“Moving them to the hills gives them more scope and if need be I can supplement them.”

Cattle and sheep are important to the overall Rangimoe system. The composite sheep flock is invaluable on the parts of the farm that can't be deer fenced.

The Angus breeding cow herd controls pasture quality. Over the last couple of years most of their progeny was sold on the autumn store market, yet that is set to change with the recent purchase of a nearby farm for finishing young cattle. This year the larger bull calves were kept entire and will be wintered for selling on the spring store market. The smaller heifer and steer calves were sold in autumn.

Diversification

Ru and Kate are diversifying both the deer and wider Rangimoe system to reduce risk and increase income.

The deer system has been changed to supply First Light Food's North American elk-based market, with the buying in of five wapiti /elk stags mated this year to the mixed-age venison hinds.

“We decided to start on the front-foot,” Gaddum explained.

“The idea is that we'll be able to kill the hybrid progeny in autumn and supply venison year round at \$10/kg.”

The venison hind herd will require a bit of juggling to maintain the right maternal genetics, which will be achieved for the short-term using dual purpose Forester genetics.

The Gaddums are considering the deer fencing of another 140ha.

“That's the goal. It will create more breeding country and more opportunity.”

Beyond deer, the growing of 20ha of malting barley on lease land is another diversification. The crop was sold for use in the brewing industry.

The Gaddums have considered carbon forestry on the steeper country but are unsure due to the logistics of access.

“I'd like to say we are going to do that, but we have to investigate further first.”

Although future-focused, Ru and Kate are happy with the present

on-farm balance and grateful for past family efforts that have created the Rangimoe legacy.

“It's been our special place since 2015, and we feel lucky to call this place home.” ■

Succession creates a legacy

A new family company structure provided the scope and autonomy for Ru and his brother Harry to pursue their respective farming aspirations. Prior to that, Rangimoe, Tuapae and other farms were run in a company half owned by Ben, with Harry and Ru each having a 25% shareholding. In 2022 Ben made the decision to step back, splitting his shareholding to each son while retaining the land in a trust. Ru and Kate formed a company which purchased the plant and livestock for Rangimoe, and they pay to the trust an annual lease for Rangimoe. Ru is well aware of the sacrifice his father has made for the sake of succession.

“It's been a huge decision for Dad to step back after a lifetime of working on the land to let us have a go. I know how much he misses it, but at the same time he's happy to see it running the way it is.”

Ben noted that there would be no farming legacy without succession.

“It has been quite a sacrifice on my part to set the two boys up with their own separate enterprises. It was not something that I was rushing to do but for the process of succession I had to do it to make it work for them.”



STUCK WITH DEER: Sticking with deer for the long-haul had helped grow the family's farming business, Ben said.



Deer fit with dairy cows on the Takapau Plains

Tony Leggett, *Deer Industry News* writer

Deer and dairy cows knit together nicely for Matt and Elisha Wade, who farm just south of Takapau in central Hawke's Bay.



GOOD FIT: Matt Wade says the feed demands from the hinds and velvetling stags fit nicely with the farm's feed supply curve, even in the dry summers typical for the region.

The couple are steadily building deer numbers on their 230ha easy rolling property, bought nearly six years ago after they built sufficient equity over a successful sharemilking career.

The Wades are in their sixth season on their current property, milking 350 spring-calving cows and producing 400kg milk solids/cow or about 145,000kg per season for the past three years.

They milk off 130ha and use the balance to raise replacements and beef-cross calves, plus grow extra feed for wintering cows in a totally self-contained enterprise.

They have 43ha fenced for deer, with another 9ha earmarked for development over the next couple of years. Matt Wade says a neighbouring lease block could also be added to the deer unit if the opportunity comes up to buy it in the future.

The Wades got a taste for deer farming when they bought a large support block at Otane in partnership with Matt's parents, while sharemilking on a 1600-cow Tikokino dairy unit. It had 110ha of deer fence and the infrastructure to support deer farming.

They initially ran dairy stock and trading lambs but when the opportunity came to buy some surplus two-year hinds from one of the region's deer farmers, George Williams from Tikokino, the Wades made the move.

"I'd seen what George and another Tikokino deer farmer, Grant Charteris, were doing with their deer, and my interest in farming them myself grew from that," Wade says.

The deer were farmed on the Otane property for two years until Wade's parents retired and the property was sold.

"We went to sell the hinds, but the deer market was a bit sticky then, so we looked at the option of setting up a deer operation here."

"If Covid had not happened and caused the venison market to slump, we probably would have sold the deer and not investigated the option at that time. As it turns out, the forced move has proven to suit the operation very well."

Another big influence on their decision to farm deer instead of expanding their cow herd was the capital outlay required to replace the aging milking plant to handle more cows.

"One of our limitations here is our current cow shed is small and can't be extended. Replacing the old 24-bale rotary plant would be a capital cost of \$2m, and it would still only be a 400-450 cow farm."



The Wades were also wary of proposed changes coming in the Tukituki Catchment Plan Change 6, aimed at capping nitrogen leaching, which could also limit the expansion in herd size.

"If Covid had not happened and caused the venison market to slump, we probably would have sold the deer and not investigated the option at that time. As it turns out the forced move has proven to suit the operation very well."

"Stacking more cows on would be challenging, but deer are better from a nitrogen leaching perspective, and they also reduced the labour requirement to. We're milking our cows twice a day for 270 days each year versus yarding our deer maybe six times a year, so it made the decision an easy one for us."

They have 100 mixed age red hinds, plus replacement stock, and a velvet herd of 70 mixed age stags, predominantly bred from Charteris' Forest Road genetics.

Velvet production is their priority.

"We've been building our breeding herd numbers since we started so we've kept pretty much everything we've bred. But we're starting to get to the stage now of being 'hind heavy,' and we can start to cull on performance."

Their oldest stags are four-years-old and nearing their peak for velvet production. Once cut, velvet is usually sold soon after to CKNZ.

"We're still learning about cutting our velvet at the right time to maximise value. We have found that velvet can change quite quickly, depending on the year. It has been cold this season, and the velvet grew slower for us."

The Wades have found local deer farmers to be very supportive. He was asked to join the original Advanced Party group, which was set up in Hawke's Bay in the early 2000s, and has since hosted two visits by the group.

"The first visit was before we started building our deer shed, so the group were great at helping with advice on location of the shed, as well as ideas on the internal design and lead-in races."

Rather than build from scratch, the Wades chose to convert a former milking shed to take advantage of its concrete floor and roof, access to electricity to power a freezer for storing velvet and lighting in the shed, plus the roading for trucks to offload or load deer.

The unfinished load-out ramp is further evidence herd growth is still underway.

"We think there's probably scope to grow our deer numbers to about 300 head all up, so the loading facility can wait a little longer!"

They've found the feed demand from hinds and their velvetting herd fit nicely with the farm's feed supply curve, even in the dry summers typical for the region.

"We've had two dry summers here since we started farming deer, but our velvet herd demand peaks in the spring and by Christmas or early January, we've usually cut our regrowth and it's back to maintenance mode for them."

DAIRY vs DEER:

Anya and Georgia Wade learned just how different rearing a fawn was compared to calves when caring for one orphan they called 'Dotty'.

The Wades have enjoyed the challenge of learning about farming deer, a very different animal to dairy cows. Matt and Elisha met while studying at Massey University between 2000 and 2003; before Matt joined DairyNZ as a consulting officer in Northland and Elisha developed her career managing a large-scale dairy farm conversion in Kerikeri. Their journey includes sharemilking jobs on two large dairy units, five seasons on an 800-cow farm near Rotorua and another seven years on a 1600-cow property in nearby Tikokino. They moved to their Takapau farm in 2018.



DAIRY vs DEER: Anya and Georgia Wade learned just how different rearing a fawn was compared to calves when caring for one orphan they called 'Dotty'.



Deer are rotationally grazed to help maintain high feed quality intake, and the Wades integrate the grazing of replacement dairy heifers with their deer, which they say works well.

To minimise the formation of natural wallows in some low lying areas, the Wades have installed a type of drain constructed from hundreds of truck tyres. The tyre drains work like a tile drain to help prevent the water from pooling and enticing deer in to wallow.

“Our heavy soils here are holding up well under the combination of dairy stock and deer,” Wade says.

In terms of mating performance (fawns weaned from hinds mated), the two-year-olds achieved 100% fawning and the mixed age hinds came in at 92%. Fawns are weaned post rut to keep mob management simpler within the limited paddock system and the need to graze replacement dairy heifers and beef-cross progeny in the deer unit for much of the year.

The Wades are using temporary Gallagher electric fence standards to subdivide larger paddocks and say they are a great low-cost, deer-proof option.

All the permanent deer fence has been constructed using their own netting roller fitted to a tractor. They can use 400m rolls, and the unit clamps and strains it where required, speeding up the construction time and reducing the cost.

“The netting roller has been excellent, and it’s getting a lot of use

around the area now. It means we can put up deer fence for about \$30/m instead of paying a higher rate to a fencing contractor.”

Small areas of both the deer and dairy units have been fenced off and planted in natives to improve shelter and provide shade for deer and dairy stock. ■



REVAMP: A deer handling facility was adapted from an old milking shed, taking advantage of the established concrete floor and roof, electricity for freezer storage and lighting, plus the roading for trucks to offload or load deer.

Quick start on Gabrielle relief

Matt Wade has a habit of never culling the contact list on his mobile phone.

It’s turned out to be surprisingly useful, especially when he needs to contact people quickly in an unfolding emergency situation like the devastating cyclone that swept through Hawke’s Bay and the East Coast last year.

The Hawke’s Bay deer and dairy farmer was able to put his contact list to great use within hours of realising the extent of the damage from Cyclone Gabrielle, and the size of the challenge for farmers to overcome.

Among his first calls were those he made to a few locals around his central Hawke’s Bay region, initially to see they were okay but also to consider what they could do for others not so fortunate.

Within 24 hours Wade and a small group of locals had set up a resource hub in a spare office at the Farm Source store in Dannevirke.

Communicating with hard-hit areas was challenging with much of the entire East Coast dealing with the deluge of rain. Phone and electricity networks were out of action for thousands of homes and hundreds of roads were impassable.

The quickly established Dannevirke hub soon drew support from Federated Farmers, DairyNZ and other local and national government agencies as the relief effort gathered momentum.

But Wade says those first few hours were critical to establishing an accurate picture of the extent of the damage and making a start on coordinating the supply of food, fuel and generators to farms

and communities cut off by the might of Cyclone Gabrielle.

By using the chat function on WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger where possible, they started gathering information and adding key ‘intel’ to a big whiteboard in the Farm Source office.

“Our initial priority was to assess needs and co-ordinate the resources that were starting to flood in.”

It led to the group arranging for a helicopter to get two Fonterra staff up to Tutira and Patoka to help dairy farmers in both those areas, which had been hit really hard.

Before long, other agencies started to gear up and take over the co-ordination role, but Wade says he’s particularly pleased with the achievements of the group he was involved with in the first few days after the cyclone.

His experience working for DairyNZ and being involved with the clean-up following the big flood that hit the Bay of Plenty region in 2003 helped with priority setting for the group.

He says getting a co-ordination centre established as soon as possible is vital to minimise the frustration from the massive logistical challenge of matching offers of help with those who need it.

“I’d really like to see a full de-brief on the Gabrielle relief effort and some detailed manuals created so we don’t reinvent the wheel again next time we have a disaster like that again. Networks are so crucial when disaster strikes. That’s why I never remove a contact in my phone. You just never know when you’ll need that person and being able to call them directly is vital when something big is happening.”

Take your commercial deer herd to the next level with Deer Select

Richard Hilson

Many deer studs use Deer Select, so why aren't commercial farmers using it? As commercial deer farmers, we have become slowly accustomed to using breed value (BV) data in our selection of stud stock, especially new sires. But is there an opportunity for farmers who breed replacement hinds or stags to gather and use BV data from their own herds? The short answer is Yes.

What is the impediment to commercial farmers using it too? In the main, probably a reluctance to get into the technology, as spreadsheets and emailing aren't everyone's cup of tea. But be assured that there is help available to make sense of your data before you submit it! There's also the unknown about the cost of using Deer Select, so let's put that issue to bed right now (so you read on!). The annual cost for a herd of 320 hinds is about \$2000. There will be extra costs of up to \$30/head if you decide to add on technology such as DNA testing or Smart Shepherd.

The big benefits of Deer Select

In the following I've used velvet BVs to explain how you can get real value from using Deer Select, but equally you could use venison growth or yield BVs. The big benefits of using Deer Select in a commercial farm relate to data storage and selection, namely:

1. Centralised storage and back-up of data

Deer Select is a great place to store data. Many farmers have a gold mine of information about their commercial velvet herds saved in spreadsheets and notebooks. It's hard, however, to get all the data lined up which is where Deer Select helps with easy and centralised storage of spreadsheets and outputs. It is also an off-site data back-up in case your laptop melts (or your notebook goes through the washing machine).

2. Selection of bought-in and homebred sire stags

Many of us use a mix of stockmanship, personal preference and Deer Select data to help with the purchasing decision of a new sire stag. We understand how to apply that process in buying-in new genetics, so why not use it when assessing potential homebred sires? One intriguing outcome from the use of Deer Select is the revelation that homebred stags have some very robust data behind them, to the point that the accuracy of that information can be far greater than that for a bought-in sire. In our case, we have confidence that several homebred sires are out-performing purchased stags once those new stags have progeny on the ground and their data entered on Deer Select.

3. Selection of replacement hinds

What do you select your replacement hinds on? Father's performance? Nice face? Bodyweight? Temperament? What do you really know about their genetics from either an antler or growth perspective?

I spent two decades selecting along known antler lines with decent performance, with an emphasis on bodyweight in December, but I know we had a lot of misfires. A key benefit of Deer Select is that you get to know the performance credentials of all your hinds because they are individually ranked from the best to the worst



SAME BUT DIFFERENT: These R2 hinds look the same but Tag 264's MVW breed value is 2.18kg, 630 grams lower than Tag 210's MVW BV of 2.81kg. That means that if these hinds were mated to the same stag offspring from 210 would likely produce 630 grams more velvet than offspring from 264.



GOODBYE 204: In this cull hind selection mob, it's Tag 204 who will be out the gate. Her MVW breed value of 1.76 is 1.2kg lower than Tag 273's MVW breed value of 2.97kg.

performers so you can really drill down on who is and who isn't performing. You have at your fingertips strong data on which hinds aren't adding anything to the velvet business or may be dragging your herd down due to negative BVs for velvet growth or weight.

We now weigh our R2 hinds in December, make notes of the nice looking and well-behaved deer, then refer to Deer Select data to make selection decisions. Knowing that all your replacements have decent breeding values is priceless and makes the selection of replacements a genuine decision, not a guess. Admittedly, nothing is a guarantee as the hinds themselves are unproven, but those linkages back to generations of data give real confidence.

4. Selection of early cull spikers

Now we're getting a bit trickier. Most of us breed more stags than we need and accordingly will run them through to two-years for a first look at what they are capable of. While early culling might not be in the plan, moving animals off as spikers might appeal to your venison marketer. It might be useful if feed is in short supply or NIWA decides there's also drought coming again.

We routinely cull about 20% of our spikers, based on their Deer Select figures. Some get a reprieve if they have something big happening in that spiker head or if they are outstanding in other respects, such as growth rate, but most are culled on the basis of low breed values. This maybe a bit risky, as it is likely that the occasional good one is culled, but some faith in the data makes it an easy decision.

5. Culling older hinds

This is a great opportunity. Deer Select attaches some value to more recent generations so you'll see those younger hinds, although often unproven by their male progeny, have velvet breed values greater than their dam. There will be some good older hinds, but many will be superseded breed value-wise by their daughters and granddaughters.

Using a list of hind breed values to culling the poorer performing ones is easy. We used this approach last spring to cull hinds held over for the higher paying early season schedule. The 30 culled were 11 percent of the hinds wintered in one herd and drafting

them out lifted the Mature Velvet Weight breed value (MVW) for the rest of the herd by 0.15, or 150 grams. The accuracy of their breed value is high now, as they have many years of data, so it is highly likely that these remaining hinds will produce male progeny, which will produce on maturity, an extra 150 grams of velvet annually.

Use Deer Select to suit your situation

Can you design your own BV? No, but you can design a recordable score. In our case, we started recording a very basic score for velvet style last year, which we will add into the data mix. Our velvet is not the prettiest, despite the good average weights, and the intention of our recordable score is to give credit to hinds that produce offspring with tidy antlers.

It's also possible to add to Deer Select information you already have on-hand for no extra cost. For example, we weigh all fawns at weaning and as yearlings and then add this data to Deer Select to give us good weight gain/growth breed values. We also foetal age the hinds at scanning and add this information to Deer Select to get breed values for early conception.

“Knowing that all your replacements have decent breeding values is priceless and makes the selection of replacements a genuine decision, not a guess.”

Admittedly, things can get a bit complicated with so much data. A good example is one of our bought-in sires who grows great antlers and passes this trait on well with a MVW BV of 4.17. However, he does shrink the kids a bit (W12 BV is -4.38kg) so we are mindful of that when we pick his girlfriends for him!

How well 'connected' am I?

This is possibly one area where Deer Select leaves commercial operators a bit dazed and confused. In simple terms, if you can create some 'connection' to other herds on Deer Select, you can benchmark your own deer performance against others on the national database. It is a bit trickier than that as you need to use the same stag – a 'link' stag – in the other herd, and ideally in the same year, which is easier said than done. You may need to consider AI using semen from the link stag, or even swapping in that stag at some point, which is fiddly and therefore less attractive to a commercial herd farmer. The point is that the use of Deer Select data, without a 'link' connection, means your comparisons between stags is only relevant within your own farm. In other words, the breed values for your animals will not directly line up with the breed values of another herd.

In summary, the opportunities for commercial breeders using Deer Select are limitless! Find out more on Deer Hub, deernz.org/deer-hub: Traits, BVs and Indices, Genetic linkage, Purchasing deer using Deer Select. ■

Richard Hilson is a Hawke's Bay farmer and vet.

Just add deer

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

BakerAg consultant and Manawatu deer farmer Matt Carroll pushed the case for diversification, and how to sell the deer farming advantage at the First Light Foods sponsored Conference 2024 workshop. He used Farmax modelling to show how diversification into deer could benefit hill country sheep and beef farmers with existing deer infrastructure.

The challenging state of play for sheep and beef farmers due to high input costs and low returns especially for lamb, had many asking ‘where to next’. There was no silver bullet on offer at conference but diversification into deer is a way to reduce the risk of overexposure to sheep and beef markets, Matt said.

He quantified the benefits of introducing to a North Island hill country sheep and beef breeding, store and finishing farm a deer breeding or finishing element using long-term average prices.

Breeding system

See Table 1

The \$/SU was the key metric and showed that deer stacked up well in a breeding system. Admittedly the gross margin was similar to sheep, but the real benefit of running breeding hinds on hill country was at a pasture and practical management level, he said. Pasture growth on hill country was boom-and-bust and often browntop-based. There was no shoulder season for growth, which was needed for a successful sheep system in the lead up to lambing, unless manipulated with nitrogen. With deer, however, no manipulation was needed because they had a more or less “flat feed” demand curve, and their lactation-induced feed demand was at peak growth on the hill country pastures.

Another consideration was the extreme weather risk and how that could impact a sheep system, especially a spring storm during the thick of lambing. But moving from say 70:30 (sheep and cattle) to a three way sheep, cattle and breeding hinds system could help

Modelling assumptions

Stock	Numbers	Purchase Liveweight	Sale Weight (CW)	Average Growth Rate g/day	Prime Price \$/kg	Store Price \$/kg
Weaner Hinds	225	60	50	177	8.50	4.80
Weaner Stags	225	64	55	188	8.50	4.80
Steers	100	220	276	700	5.80	3.40
Store Lambs	883	30	20	140	7.50	3.40

Notes for table:

Per SU figure is on opening stock numbers.

Opening stock numbers used are relative for each species on June 1.

Breeding system

Pre-rut weaning for deer

All progeny, except replacements, sold at weaning

alleviate the exposure to extreme weather.

The labour requirements were also worth consideration. Deer were less labour intensive than sheep, and the busy times of marking, weaning and velvet sire stag management worked in well with peak sheep management tasks of shearing, weaning, drenching and lambing.

Finishing system

See Table 2

In a finishing scenario, the bottom line measure of success was the return from each kilogram of drymatter eaten. In Matt’s Farmax model, deer came out tops (31c/kg DM) followed by sheep (27c/kg DM) and beef (18c/kg DM). This included velvet sales from spikers.

The wild card for a new comer to the industry was forming relationships to source weaners and at a price where both breeder and finisher were financially rewarded.

“I think that’s where we as an industry can draw in new people, but we need to look at transparent options such as a split profit share system with breeders and finishers so there isn’t huge price fluctuations,” Matt said.

More levers to pull

Matt is a firm believer in diversified businesses because from a financial and systems perspective they are sustainable.

Finishing system

Cattle purchased at autumn weaner fairs and finished

A single winter lamb trade

A split of 50/50 stags to hinds, pre- and post-rut weaners taken to prime weights

A saw-toothed looking graph charting the gross margins and operating profit for cattle, deer and dairy enterprises respectively proved that returns for each were volatile. Diversification could reduce exposure to the extremes of a single enterprise and create more consistency in profitability.

“We all have a responsibility to bring new people into the industry”

Diversification equals resilience and gives farmers “more levers to pull,” he said.

“It’s not just about rolling with the punches. It’s also about making sure the punches don’t hit so hard next time,” he said. ■



DIVERSIFY: There are “more levers to pull” in a diversified farm business, Matt Carroll said.

Table 1: Breeding system

	GM Total	\$/SU	c/kgDM	kg/DM	5 – 6 year average \$/kg
Sheep	\$44,994	84.10	14.10	319,106	3.40
Cattle	\$37,123	77.99	11.30	328,522	3.40
Deer	\$41,747	85.90	14.30	291,937	4.80

Table 2: Finishing system

	GM Total	\$/SU	c/kgDM	kg/DM	5 – 6 year average \$/kg
Sheep	\$33,455	61.27	27.0	123,907	7.50
Cattle	\$63,405	119.63	18.8	337,261	5.80
Deer	\$68,844	120.36	31.0	222,077	8.50

Selling the story

Some might argue that the workshop was preaching to the converted, given that most of those who attended the conference were deer industry diehards. But the purpose of the presentation, supported and driven by the NZDFA Executive, was to sell deer farming and attract new entrants to the industry.

“We’re losing breeding hinds, and we need to maintain critical mass,” NZDFA president Mark McCoard said.

“We saw an opportunity for an exercise like this to provide the reasons and some numbers for sheep and beef farmers to consider.”

He said that some had questioned why velvet returns and

gross margins were left out of the analysis to make an even more compelling case for deer diversification. Those figures had deliberately been ignored because the exercise was about promoting an increase in venison hinds and highlighting the benefits of venison as a stand-alone farming enterprise.

Another goal of the workshop was to disprove the misconception with some bank managers and lenders that returns from venison were more volatile than those from sheep or beef.

“The inclusion of gross margins per stock unit and operating profit per hectare over time showed that all stock classes – sheep, cattle deer and dairy – were volatile.”



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Looking at deer through the Wormwise lens

Ginny Dodunski

Deer farms may well encompass the most variable range of systems of any pastoral enterprise in New Zealand. Deer are farmed in every geographic and climatic extreme, from the extensive tussock country of the Southern Alps to the intensive dairy soils in the Waikato. Enterprises range from single focus breeding, velvet or weaner finishing to a mix of all three.



Deer may be the only species on the farm, or integrated with sheep and cattle, or even goats. Because of the many system variations, giving generic deer parasite management advice is nigh-on impossible. But some core Wormwise principles from sheep and cattle also apply to deer:

- In adult stock, great nutrition and body condition management will generally prevent any requirement for routine drenching. When well-fed adults share grazing areas with weaners, they can both reduce the larval challenge to weaners by taking in more larvae than they consume and provide a source of worms in refugia if weaners are drenched.
- Provision of high quality, low worm contamination pasture or other forages for young stock results in better liveweight gains and reduces the need for suppressive drenching regimes.
- Cross- and co-grazing with other livestock classes reduces the worm challenge and can improve liveweight gains in weaned animals.
- When worm treatment is needed, it's important to use a highly effective product to inadvertently encourage a burgeoning population of resistant worms 'screened' by partially effective products.

Beyond these general principles, there are unique considerations for deer:

- Deer are more susceptible to lungworm than most other farmed species, and worm control programmes on deer farms typically centre around preventing outbreaks of lungworm. However, 'no lungworm seen' isn't the same as 'parasites aren't impacting production'. The unseen effects of both gut and lung worms can be affecting growth performance, if drench is the only means being used to manage the worm challenge to young stock.
- Wapiti can be more severely affected by parasites of the fourth stomach (abomasum) than other types of deer, and in some cases adult animals may require treatment to prevent so-called 'fading elk' syndrome.
- Monitoring via faecal egg counts (FEC) can be more difficult in deer than it is in sheep and cattle. 'Trigger' levels for drenching are not well established and samples can be difficult to collect, which is why few farmers do any routine faecal monitoring. That said, it can still be a useful tool to assess how things are going! As a guide FECs and lungworm

could be taken ten days after a drench, when counts should be zero if no drench resistance is present. A sample around one month after drench will help assess how quickly young stock are becoming re-infected. That said, FECs should **NEVER** be interpreted in isolation – the information must be assessed alongside how well the animals are performing, the type of feed they've been on, and what's in front of them. A standard faecal egg count provides information on all the gut worms, including *Ostertagia* type worms. A separate lungworm larval count must be requested if lungworm estimation is required – lungworm in the faeces are present as larvae, not eggs, and the method to separate and count them is different.

- When it comes to product use, if you are using cattle or sheep products off-label, it's important to use the correct dose amount. Consult your vet for help with this.
- The reason that the industry funded the development of Cervidae® oral drench was that the concentration of anthelmintics in sheep and cattle combinations are too low for deer. Deer require a double dose of the ML/mectin family and a higher dose still of the Benzimidazole family. Levamisole tends to be only partially effective in deer but can still have some additive efficacy when used in combination.

"Because of the many deer system variations, giving generic parasite management advice is nigh-on impossible. But some core Wormwise principles apply."

As drench resistance becomes more of an issue in this deer, attention will need to turn from 'what drench do I use?' to rather setting up farm systems that reduce the risk of parasite issues in the first place. Very good nutrition is a great start. ■

Ginny Dodunski is a Manawatu vet and Wormwise Programme manager. Wormwise is a Beef & Lamb New Zealand programme providing farmers with the latest knowledge and techniques to manage worms effectively and sustainably, and minimise drench resistance issues.

No one ever regrets buying quality

Benjamin Franklin was on the money when he said: “The bitterness of poor quality remains long after the sweetness of low price is forgotten.”

Buying cheaper genetics might seem appealing at the time, especially when times are tough, but as Melior owner Tom Macfarlane says, those decisions can be short-sighted.

“You’re only booking the short-term gain and forgetting the next season’s pain and beyond when that progeny doesn’t produce and perform to the level and profitability you need for your farm,” he says.

Genetics is a long-term game, and decisions made will hopefully compound to create the right upward spiral for your farm in terms of heavier finishing weights, eye muscles area (EMA) or whatever attributes you happen to be chasing for your specific farming system.

For almost 10 years, Melior has been doing its utmost to provide commercial farming clients with the very best genetics, backed with plenty of evidence-based DeerSelect proof to help them make informed buying decisions.

Melior has remained committed to its cause of next level genetics, with a good example being their annual embryo transfer programme.

“Each year we implant 200 or more embryos from our top females to multiply those genetics faster. This means we make sure we can supply our clients with the next level of genetics at realistic prices,” Tom says.

EMA scanning is another technology used and further evidence-based data proving the productive-worth of Melior deer.

The size and scale of the Melior operation allows selection pressure to be pushed to the max, meaning clients can be confident in the productive potential of what they purchase.

Melior deer are run in a strictly commercial herd situation; there’s no pampering with supplementary concentrate feeding or unnecessary drenching.

“Our deer have to stand on their two feet – figuratively speaking!”

At this year’s hind sale, there is no excuse not to buy better. On offer will be around 500 R2 and R3 high growth rate hinds, providing buyers plenty of choice regardless of budget. ■

Advertorial supplied.

Melior 8th In-Calf Hind Sale

Tuesday July 2 @ 1pm. Viewing and BBQ, kindly sponsored by Duncan Venison, from 12 noon. 480 Gudex Road, RD17, Fairlie.

Tom MacFarlane 027 600 8555 / Murray Coutts 027 403 9377



RAISING THE SELECTION BAR: Size and scale plus science-backed Deer Select data means clients can be confident in the performance potential of Melior deer.

Golden career

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

High prices, big personalities and special places are the stand-out memories for Ron Schroeder (Schroeds), who is bowing out of the stock and station industry after fifty years, most of that as a deer specialist.



HIGHLIGHT: Winning the 2022 Deer Industry Award was a career highlight for Ron Schroeder (right) receiving the award from Tony Pearse.

Schroeder's deer involvement began in the late 1970s following a Southland holiday when he was introduced to Ray Jennings, a pioneer deer farmer. Jennings was hand-raising live recovered fawns, and it sparked Schroeder's interest. He bought and sold his first deer in 1978, and it was the start of a career that took him the length of the country and beyond. He had sealed sales and purchase agreements for thousands of clients.

During the 1980s, Schroeder, accompanied by Bob Swann, another pioneering deer farmer, went on numerous overseas deer-buying missions for clients to the UK and Europe. Schroeder brokered many live imports of deer, requiring him to be onsite in the country of origin for quarantine and health inspections. He said in *In Hindsight, 50 years of deer farming in New Zealand*, that despite the cost and time involved, the imported animals were a worthwhile investment for breeders.

His knowledge of all things deer grew in line with the rapidly developing and newest pastoral sector, and his experience went beyond buying and selling deer. He recalled in *In Hindsight* a three week velvet buying road trip with his son, on behalf of a Korean client, which included a stop-off at a hall near Rotorua. Schroeder was one of a few buyers, including a Korean who disappeared briefly and returned with a suitcase full of neatly folded cash – an instant magnet for the assembled farmers!

He overviewed his career and significant industry milestones in a recent *Country-Wide* podcast recalling the highs – the sale of in-calf hinds in the mid-1980s at \$4500-plus, and the lows – the slump in venison prices in 2006 to \$4/kg.

The swings and roundabouts of markets countered by the incredible ability of the industry to regroup, innovate and move ahead were defining factors of the deer farming sector, he said.

Over his lengthy involvement he had assimilated an encyclopaedic deer-related knowledge and had supported many deer industry events. He had also supported deer farmers to build their businesses, and in more recent times had enjoyed helping out the next generation of deer farmers. That long-service dedication earned him the Deer Industry Award in 2022. The award, noting his services to livestock sales, deer genetics and quality assurance, was a career highlight and very humbling, he said. A supporting tongue-in-cheek statement as part of the award nomination said that Schroeder “farms deer, buys and sells them, hunts them, eats them and (probably) dreams about them.”

Looking back, Schroeder said he wouldn't change a thing about a career that had revolved around innovative, good people who were happy to share their knowledge.

His advice to deer farmers was to “go hard and stick with it.”

“We produce the best protein in the world, and it's an exciting industry.” ■

For more on Schroeder's recollection and involvement in the deer industry, go to the Country-Wide Podcast, Episode 22 'Exciting times ahead for the deer industry' country-wide.co.nz/episode-22-exciting-times-ahead-for-the-deer-industry

Obituary

Jock Allison

Dr Arthur John (Jock) Allison who died recently aged 80, was a legend in his own lifetime.



DEER SUPPORTER: Jock Allison was a huge supporter of Invermay's deer programme.

Allison's career was closely entwined with Invermay Research Centre over nearly 60 years. He was the director of the Invermay campus from 1978-86, and during that time oversaw the redevelopment of the facilities.

Although best known for his contributions to the sheep industry, particularly studies and research to improve reproductive performance, he also pushed the case for deer farming by supporting Dr Ken Drew to establish Invermay's Deer Research Group. Drew says

Allison was very keen on any new initiatives that could be translated into things that would be of real value to the farming industry.

“As the deer programme got underway, Jock realised that little was known about the reproductive processes in the animal,” Drew says.

“With great gusto, Jock decided that he would be the one that documented that part of the research. But there was a problem. The first time Jock went into the yards with a group of hinds, he came out all blotchy from a severe allergic reaction to the animals and was never seen anywhere near deer again.”

Drew says that an Invermay prankster produced a Director Deflector - a plastic bag filled with deer hair that could be pinned to the wall to keep Jock out!

“To be fair, Jock was a huge supporter of the deer programme and encouraged the partnership approach with farmers, entrepreneurs and people that were gradually developing the new industry.”

In a 2022 *Otago Daily Times* article looking back at 50 years of deer science at Invermay, Jamie Ward acknowledged Allison's bravery in backing Drew and the embryonic deer farming industry.

“Science needs to take risks, and Jock and Ken took a risk – not only on their reputations and careers but on an entire industry.”

Allison's work has been widely recognised. In 2000 he received the NZ Society of Animal Production's Sir Arthur Ward Award and was made an Officer of the NZ Order of Merit for services to agriculture. In 2003 he received the Bledisloe Medal for distinguished contributions to NZ's land-based industries.

His passing is a big loss to New Zealand's agricultural industry. ■

Contributed by Ken Drew and John McEwan



MSD/Allflex Deer Industry Photo Competition winners



1st place (Front cover photo)

Kristen Rowe - Dundas Creek Stags

2nd place (top right)

Sophie Hansen - Mother and fawn

3rd place (Second right)

Gordon Murray - Nothing to see here, move on please

People's Choice (Third right)

Mike Thomas - Make me!

Elk/Waipiti award (Bottom right)

Tony Pidgeon - Sunset bull



SUCCESS ISN'T ACCIDENTAL

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If you want weaners to finish at heavier weights and earlier, we can also help.

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We look forward to seeing you at our 8th Hinds sale.



8th In Calf Hinds Sale, Tuesday 2 July 1pm
(Viewing and BBQ from 12pm). 480 Gudex Road, RD17, Fairlie

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