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# Deer Industry News

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## Contents

### Editorial

Board diversity, accountability, transparency . . . . . 3

### In Brief

Gabrielle's silver lining . . . . . 4

### Meet and Greet

Damon Paling . . . . . 6

### Industry News

- A leader to many . . . . . 8
- Fair game . . . . . 10
- Zooming in on elk. . . . . 11
- Stag sale calendar 2024/25. . . . . 12

### DINZ News

- RAP seeks input. . . . . 14
- Advance Parties facilitators gather at High Peak . . . . . 16

### Venison

- New chapter. . . . . 18
- No quarter spared . . . . . 20

### NZDFA

- Diverse lineup . . . . . 22
- Tick talk . . . . . 24

### On Farm

- Hunkering down for good . . . . . 28
- Livestock contracts help cashflow lease . . . . . 30

### Animal Health

- A look ahead to fawning . . . . . 33

### Recipe

- Venison Cornish pasties . . . . . 34

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# Board diversity, accountability, transparency

Our industry is filled with stories of bravery, of guts and taking the plunge. I was thinking of this after spending some time at the Deer Industry NZ (DINZ) offices in Wellington. I had told someone that bravery is good; I'll take bravery as long as it is sensible bravery framed by good oversight. That is where governance, and I as the board chair, sit: watching the doing, not doing the doing, but making sure the doing is on the right track.



The DINZ board is a strong board, diverse in its composition. We've got a good 50/50 split between producers and processors/exporters. That's hugely valuable. My role is really about quiet but firm leadership and creating an environment where everybody is given the opportunity to express themselves. It's not only about providing that opportunity but encouraging those who may have the relevant subject matter expertise to share that knowledge with the room.

It is a board full of expertise – be that Gerard (Hickey, deputy chair) in the commercial space or Jacqueline (Rowarth) in science or any of the other board members in their respective areas.

At the end of the day, however, we are governors, not managers. Part of my role is to make sure we don't intrude too far into management. The board has a great deal of confidence in Rhys and the DINZ staff, as well as the refreshed strategy.

Closely tied to board oversight is another priority going forward – accountability. Essentially, do what you've been tasked with. If we break that down, it is creating a strategy, building your plans, adhering to both, and meeting timelines. If there are problems or concerns, then those problems are raised early so we can look to remediate them with sound options as early as possible.

We must be transparent with those that pay. Ultimately, we are answerable to our levy payers. We can't always share everything, but we must share enough to install confidence in the industry.

Finally, an area of perceived concern I would like to see better understood is the relationship between the deer industry and AgResearch. I'm on the board, so I get the information that makes me feel good about that relationship, but it's certainly possible that communications, and therefore understanding, about that relationship, as well as the changes that have happened over the past 6-12 months, have not been optimal.

As such, it was never the relationship itself that was damaged but the communications, or lack thereof, around it. Now that DINZ has a full-time communications manager, I would expect this to change.

I want every single person involved in the deer industry to see what I see, and feel what I feel. I want them to feel confident. I want them to feel proud of what they do and the part they play. I want them to see the potential for a positive future so they want to continue to invest in our industry, so that our industry can succeed now and into the future. ■

Paddy Boyd, DINZ board chair

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## CINTAlating talk

Have your say and help shape the future of farming in New Zealand by joining the CINTA Collective.



CINTA, an agri-focused market research company, has a collective of 20,000 farmers and agri businesses who are called on and surveyed for opinions on a range of issues, but there's space for more, CINTA's George Glubb says.

"Our biggest asset is our community, and the insights they provide help influence important decisions for rural NZ."

All information provided is confidential and used strictly for research purposes only. The time commitment is not huge, assures Glubb, with one survey or two a month at most. Signing up and participating will benefit the wider rural community, with every registration and survey response given followed up with a CINTA donation to charities supporting rural New Zealand: NZ Young Farmers, NZ Rural Women, Rural Change and Rural Support. Find out more from [george@cinta.co.nz](mailto:george@cinta.co.nz)

## Star-rated venison

Charred NZ venison contributed to the "Billion Star Dining" rating of the Mt. Cook Lakeside Retreat, mentioned in *Time* magazine's annual list of the world's greatest places. The five-star Mackenzie basin retreat by Lake Pukaki was the only NZ accommodation to feature in the 'World's Greatest Places to Stay' list. The destinations were selected by the New York-based magazine and website's global network of correspondents and contributors.



"At the Mt. Cook Lakeside Retreat, you can marvel at no less than a billion of them (stars), paired with pinot noir and charred venison," judges said. Investigation by *Deer Industry News* revealed that the venison in the stellar offering were tender loins supplied by the Merchant of Venison.

## Gabrielle's silver lining

Hawke's Bay deer hunters will be an indirect beneficiary of Cyclone Gabrielle thanks to the infusion of "useful genetics" to the local feral deer population, as reported in *The Country* earlier this year. NZDFA executive member Evan Potter said the massive slips and washouts that wiped out fences led to the escape of many farmed deer, including stags who were quick to take up the opportunity to breed with feral hinds. Potter said the "unintentional benefits" for hunters would be some impressive heads.

Meanwhile, earlier this year four runaway stags from the Potter's farm returned home in hard antler.

"They knew where home was, and I don't think they had wandered far away," he says.

## Sustainability winner

Congratulations to Becks Smith (*Deer Industry News*, Issue 117), recipient of the Environmental Sustainability Award at the



2023 NZ Veterinary Association conference. Judges noted the "dedication to promoting holistic sustainability in agriculture" through her company, The Whole Story (TWS), which offers a range of services aimed at enhancing farm sustainability. TWS is a B-Corp certified social enterprise, meaning it meets pre-determined standards of social and environmental performance, accountability, and transparency.

"These efforts have undoubtedly made a significant difference in advancing environmental stewardship in our community," award judges said.

Smith's latest sustainability move is Solayer, an initiative supporting farmers to generate and utilise as much of their own energy as possible. She says that on-farm energy generation is a smart way to reduce expenses and emissions footprint, develop a revenue generating opportunity, and build business and local community resilience. Find out more: [www.solayer.co.nz](http://www.solayer.co.nz)

## Good one Jack!

Jack Goodwin (16) pictured with Angela McIntyre was the youngest of the 2024 Next Generation crowd. He came along with McIntyre, an Ohingaiti deer farmer who mentors Goodwin on-farm one day a week through Feilding High School's gateway programme. Goodwin is looking forward to more hands-on deer farming experience over the summer holidays at Pamu's Rangitaiki Station. Goodwin, who's from a sheep and beef farm neighbouring the McIntyre's, is very keen to add deer to the farming mix, and has told his dad he'll be deer fencing part of the farm for fallow and red deer.



"Dad isn't into deer, but he's pleased that I am," Goodwin says. See page 22 for more on this year's Next Generation event.

## Lepto awareness

Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) has once again joined forces with Massey University to help raise awareness and funds to combat leptospirosis.

"We have a proud history over the past 50 years in raising awareness and much needed funds to better control the disease. By making leptospirosis our national project until June 2025, we can again mobilise our members across the country," RWNZ national president Gill Naylor says.

New Zealand has one of the highest rates of leptospirosis in countries with temperate climates and last year 170 cases were notified, nearly all in people living rurally. Massey University Professor of Veterinary Public Health Jackie Benschop says it's the tip of the iceberg as there are many cases missed because lepto can look like Covid or the flu, and there are issues with getting a diagnosis.

"Our data shows that 70 per cent of people suspected of having leptospirosis are not tested for it," she says.

Protection against lepto "mimics good farm management," and includes vaccinating stock, adopting good hygiene practices, wearing PPE, controlling effluent, waterways and rodents, and training staff and visitors. "Above all, if you are feeling unwell,

seek help early. Tell your doctor leptospirosis may be the cause and ask to be tested.”

There are three strains of bacterium that cause leptospirosis in deer: *Leptospira Hardjo-bovis* (the most widely spread), *L. Pomona* and *L. Copenhageni*. All three strains can cause serious disease in humans.

Visit [www.ruralwomennz.nz/lepto](http://www.ruralwomennz.nz/lepto) to view an information poster about protecting yourself from Lepto.

## Landify

Moving along the pathway to farm ownership is a big challenge facing many young people. The issue became an MBA topic for Sarah How and led to the development of soon-to-be-live digital farming partnership platform Landify.

How co-founded the business with Tara Dwyer, both of whom have broad agri-career backgrounds. How's experience spans agronomy, environmental management, and most recently R&D for DairyNZ. Dwyer is Headwaters NZ's breeding manager and has valuable experience from on-farm and farmer-facing roles. Through their wide-ranging experience, they became aware of and disillusioned by the trajectory of farm ownership in New Zealand.

“We've seen firsthand the difficulties that families are having finding options for succession and retirement planning,” How says.



“We also know that the road to land ownership is untenable for many young people. It's difficult to conceive how many will ever get a crack and go on to build the agile, future-facing and innovative businesses the industry now demands.”

The pair designed Landify to be an accessible way to create partnerships between established farmers, next generation farmers and investors. The website is a matchmaking platform that farmers can join for free. There will be newsletters with listings from farming businesses looking for lease or equity partnership arrangements, investors open to backing family farming operations, and people seeking farming partnership opportunities. There's also the option, with the payment of a fee, to list what you're after. Take a look at: [landify.co.nz](http://landify.co.nz) ■

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# Paling paving trade pathways

Agreement between China and New Zealand government agencies on new formal arrangements for frozen velvet access is great news for the deer industry. The news is especially satisfying for Damon Paling, who has been working on behalf of DINZ since February to assist and progress the negotiation process. Paling describes his contract DINZ position as a mix of trade advisory and project management. He is well-qualified for the role, having spent 20 years living and working in East Asia with multinational professional services corporate PwC before appointment as a New Zealand Trade & Enterprise trade commissioner based in Shanghai from January 2016 until December 2019.



**Restoring NZ frozen velvet access has been front of mind for the deer industry. You've been involved in these negotiations since the beginning of the year. How are you feeling now that we are almost at the 'finishing line'?**

Positive and excited. We are beginning to see some interest from buyers in China, with deposits starting to come through. That's good news as it shows there is a path in place for market access of frozen velvet. It's also good news because it has alleviated some of the anxiety and stress for farmers.

**What exactly is your role in the frozen velvet access issue?**

It's a multifaceted role that has included providing technical input to the market access team at MPI, advocating our case before various government agencies, contingency planning, gathering updates from China, and communicating to a wide range of stakeholders. It's been a very fluid situation because throughout the process, DINZ has not worked directly with the Chinese authorities on restoring frozen velvet access. In my role, I've been working closely with the Deer Velvet Access Group (DVAG) to get the right information to the government agencies who have lobbied and negotiated on our behalf.

**What is the DVAG?**

It's a subcommittee of the DINZ board group, plus one independent velvet exporter, formed in November last year following notification of changes to China's rules for imported frozen velvet. It has farmer, exporter, and DINZ representation, and my role as project manager was to communicate back and forth between DVAG and MPI with relevant information, guidance and instruction so that no stone was left unturned in restoring market access.

**Restoring frozen velvet access has taken several months, and from the sounds of things it's been a difficult process. Why?**

Yes, it has been difficult due to the number of agencies involved on the China side. The Chinese authorities are also resource-

constrained, yet they must work with over 100 countries who also regard China as their most economically important trading partner. Another difficulty was the time pressure of having access restored for the upcoming season while meeting the requirements of velvet exporters and the government agencies in China.

**Could you explain a bit about the complications?**

New Zealand has a \$20 billion trade relationship with China, and a lot of that is food and beverage exports. That's a huge portfolio resting on the shoulders of MPI. At the same time, we've had to convey that our \$120 million velvet trade is important to our exporters and farmers. We must appreciate, however, that NZ velvet equates to only a small part of the China trade relationship, so it's a challenge to be heard and not jeopardise the bigger trade picture. Another difficulty is monitoring the geopolitical relationship as we prefer it to be on an even keel.

**You are a former trade commissioner, a role that most of us have heard of but know little about. What exactly does a trade commissioner do?**

It sounds very grandiose but in reality, it's quite a lot different from that. I led a team of 10 business development managers and worked with NZ exporters around market entry and market activation within China. I supported around 150 NZ exporters, most of whom were food and beverage exporters and used Shanghai as their entry point into China.

**What were some highlights during your time in that role?**

Working with Chinese entrepreneurs is a lot of fun because their dreams and ambitions are huge. A highlight was living in Shanghai, a city of 25 million people. I saw a huge change in society over a very short period in terms of e-commerce, digitalisation and the rise of the middle-class consumers. It was a fascinating time for me.

**Life as a career diplomat sounds exhausting. What do you do to unwind after hours?**

I do some trail running. I live in central Auckland in an apartment, so I really enjoy getting outside in open spaces and native bush. I also race sailboats as it's very intense and keeps me focused on the job at hand rather than ruminating over work all the time. ■



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– Colin Gates, Waihi Pukawa station, Taupo

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# A leader to many

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Leadership, strategic thinking, diplomacy and common sense are the qualities that James Guild used to great effect during his 40-year contribution to the deer industry.



**ON REFLECTION:** James Guild at High Peak's early May field day celebrating the family's multiple category wins in the Canterbury Ballance Environmental Farm Awards. The Guilds went on to win the Gordon Stephenson Trophy.

"I find it hard to name anyone who has made a greater contribution to our industry," Trevor Walton said on learning of Guild's death on 1 September.

Walton's comment is backed by his 50-years-plus media coverage, including 30 years as publisher/editor of the *The Deer Farmer* magazine.

"James was a warrior," he says.

"Not all deer farmers of his era agreed with him, but none could argue his passion and commitment to the interests of all who farmed deer."

Guild sometimes had a "gruff manner and a tendency to harrumph in response to arguments he didn't agree with...but that was something of a cloak for a man with a kind heart and a great sense of humour."

The era of Guild's active industry involvement spanned the 1980s-1990s, a full-on chapter of turbulent change, challenge and robust debates as the world's newest farmed livestock industry took shape. It was a time of big thinking and bold action in which Guild played an integral role, especially during his five-year term as NZDFA chair. He fought fearlessly for deer farmer interests, Walton says.

"James never worried about stepping on eggshells. His direct approach rubbed a few the wrong way. Especially those who claimed to be acting in farmers best interests, while protecting their own."

That ability to tackle the hard stuff soon became apparent after stepping into the role of NZDFA chair in 1988 following the untimely death of incumbent chair Ian Spiers. Deer farming, after a meteoric and high-profile rise during the early 1980's, was on a slippery slope due to tax policy and livestock valuation changes, which quickly turned off the outside investment that had fuelled the industry's formative years. Guild recalled in *'In Hindsight, 50 years of deer*

*farming in New Zealand'* that his biggest concern on taking on the NZDFA chair role was "how to keep the industry from collapsing."

He took a head-on approach to solve the problem, enlisting support from switched-on farm accountant Alison Dinsdale-Johnston and cold-calling the head offices of bankers to plead the case for deer farming. Guild explained that his heartfelt pleas, backed with Dinsdale-Johnston's facts and figures, won through.

"We did it quietly, and it did succeed in making the banks of significance realise that the industry had legs and would recover."

Not so quiet or behind-the-scenes was a huge argument in the lead-up to the introduction of a velvetting code of practice in 1994, including the humane removal of velvet by competent farmers. The New Zealand Veterinary Association wanted direct supervision of velvet removal, whereas the NZDFA, led by Guild, argued this was impractical and unnecessary given that many of the vets would be supervising farmers who had taught them how to remove velvet in the first place. Eventually the concept of indirect farmer supervision was agreed; it's a right taken for granted by deer farmers today, and they have Guild to thank for doggedly pursuing the issue. It was arguably his most enduring political legacy.

Aside from the heavy politics and issues of the day, Guild took seriously the business of showcasing and celebrating the industry. He was the key organiser of the 1993 World Deer Congress staged in Canterbury, attracting 700 people from 200 countries.

Family friend and industry colleague Tom Williams recalled in his eulogy at Guild's funeral a highlight of the Congress, a visit to High Peak and Quartz Hill Stations. At the beginning of the road to High Peak, all buses were held up by a bunch of cowboys who boarded the bus and proceeded to drench passengers with a white 'drench' (Baileys Irish cream).

In the book *In Hindsight*, Guild said that in addition to the velvet code and the World Deer Congress, his deer industry leadership highlights were contributing to the GIB (predecessor to DINZ) launch of a venison marketing strategy, convincing the wider farming community to support Tb control, establishment of the Deer Development Council (a national referencing scheme that led on to the concept of monitor farms), and establishment of the Land User Forum in conjunction with Federated Farmers. It's an impressive line-up of achievements that Guild was never formally acknowledged for by the industry, Williams says.

"From his time as chair of the Canterbury branch in 1982 through to his sudden elevation to NZDFA president, and then as a producer member on the Game Industry Board, his contribution to the deer industry has been immense.

"It is a matter of regret that at no stage has James nor his wife Anna been recognised by the deer industry with any life membership or industry award.



“The support for James that culminated in him being granted a MNZM at the 2017 Queens Birthday Honours award came specifically from the Conservation and Tourist sectors.”

Guild was an avid high-country farmer and a conservationist, two passions and the perfect background for leadership roles he took on subsequent to his deer industry involvement.

He was a prime mover in the establishment of the Game Animal Council (GAC), which has done much to raise ethical standards in the trophy hunting business. Between 2008 and 2014, he was a member of the establishment committee set up to provide advice to government on the best way to set up a GAC. This process culminated in the passing of the Game Animal Council Act in 2013. However, Guild’s involvement predates 2008, as he was also a founding board member of the Game and Forest Foundation, the precursor to the GAC, chair of the establishment committee Garry Ottmann says.

“Foresight, strategic thinking, pragmatism, and political acumen were attributes James brought to both the Game and Forest Foundation and the GAC establishment committee,” he says.

“James’s many years of hard work have made a significant contribution to the strong position the game animal sector finds itself in today.”

Guild brought those same qualities to the chair’s role of QE2 National Trust. He was “parachuted” into the role, QE2 chief executive Dan Coup says, because of his proven track record of effective leadership. His big achievements over his three terms in the chair were the successful negotiation of the 53,000ha Mahu Whenua covenant – the largest in the country – covering pastoral lease land between Wanaka and Queenstown. Also of note was the gifting of Remarkables Station to QE2 by the Jardine family.

“That happened because of the friendship and the deep respect the Jardines had for James.”

Coup says Guild was a strong and caring leader who related well with farmers, bureaucrats and dignitaries.

While he was adept at negotiating Wellington primary industry-political channels, Guild’s heart was never far from High Peak Station, the place he and Anna called home for 51 years. The family frequently welcomed local and overseas visitors, the most recent a group of deer industry Advance Parties facilitators (see page 16).

In a social media tribute, the family said he came to the undeveloped foothills valley of inland Canterbury, and after an initial push of developing the challenging high country on the back of government incentives, he soon saw the need to balance production with the protection of High Peak’s unique natural habitat. Guild’s visionary thinking, strategic planning and follow-through, in conjunction with family members, had created “a highly diversified, multigenerational business – an enduring legacy within New Zealand agriculture.”

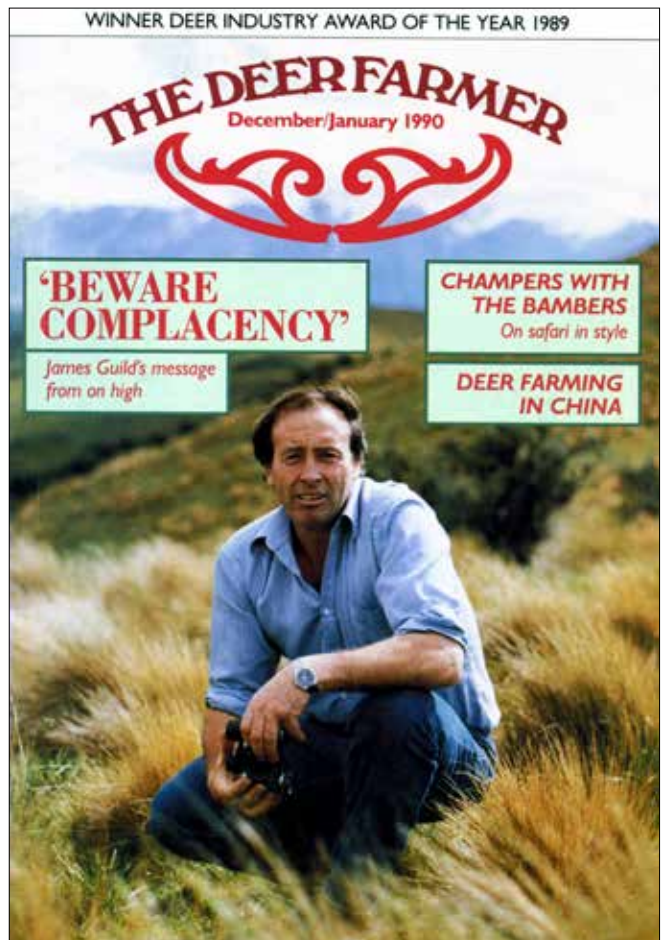
The success of those efforts earned High Peak the Gordon Stephenson Trophy, the Ballance Farm Awards highest honour. The award and ceremony were a fitting, albeit bittersweet, accolade for terminally ill James Guild.

He was first and foremost a family man who had a vision for his family, his property and the many organisations he involved himself in. His lifetime of service has left an indelible mark on his country. ■

**On behalf of all New Zealand deer farmers, thank you Anna and family for supporting James to be an influential and respected leader to many.**



AT HOME: James Guild happy in his homespun in the tussock country of High Peak.



BACK IN THE DAY: On the front cover of The Deer Farmer (December/January 1990).

# Fair game

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Is an escaped, tagged deer fair game? No, but it's a complicated issue.

*Deer Industry News* delved into the topic of what to do when tagged deer stray following the recent experience of Te Awamutu deer farmer Steve Johnson, who faced a drawn-out remedial process following a breakout in March 2021.

When Johnson became aware that some of his deer had strayed onto his neighbour's property, he visited the farmer the following evening to make arrangements to retrieve them. That's when he heard gunshots. The neighbour then told Johnson the gunshots were from hunters he had asked to shoot the stray deer. The neighbour refused Johnson access, and later informed him that four deer had been shot, each with ear tags.



**HOLD FIRE:** Farmers should clearly identify stray deer before pulling the trigger.

Johnson made a complaint to the police, yet no charges were made following the investigation. The police deemed the incident a civil claim for the Disputes Tribunal, which Johnson followed up. At a tribunal hearing, four questions were addressed to arrive at a decision: How many deer belonging to Johnson were shot? Were the neighbour and hunters liable for the loss of the deer? Did Johnson contribute to the loss of the deer? What was the value of the deer that were shot?

**“There’s a mindset with some farmers that deer are noxious animals, so if they encounter a stray deer, they shoot first and ask questions later. They wouldn’t do that to (stray) cattle or sheep with tags, so why would a deer with a tag in its ear be any different?”**

Photographic evidence supplied by the neighbour proved that four deer were shot but only two ear tag numbers were clearly identified. On this basis, the tribunal ruled that only two of the deer were owned by Johnson.

The tribunal ruled that the neighbour was solely responsible for the loss of the deer. The neighbour did not tell the hunters he had recently seen stray deer with tags. The hunters, under the impression they were shooting feral deer, started shooting on sunset and were about 180 metres away from the animals.

The tribunal said Johnson should have had a second fence close to the boundary and needed to regularly check his fences. Also, the deer would never have been shot if he had notified the neighbour

the day before. However, there was no evidence that Johnson had breached the duty of a “reasonable deer farmer,” with all parties agreeing that deer are “resourceful animals, with an ability to jump very high and get through small spaces.”

The value of the two red top-end velvet breeding hinds was assessed by a livestock agent at \$5000.

The eventual financial compensation was a small win for a drawn-out process, and Johnson says deer farmers need to know what they should do if faced with a similar situation.

The reclaiming of escaped farmed deer is a problem that former DINZ producer manager Tony Pearse dealt with from time-to-time. In most situations, the issue is resolved with goodwill, yards and a tag scanner, he says.

“If the deer can be run into the yards and the tags scanned, it will be obvious which ones have escaped and who owns them.”

In some cases, it might not be possible to yard the escaped deer. In such situations, shooting the deer by mutual agreement could be the only solution. However, the owner of the shot deer should not

## CHECK FIRST

NZDFA executive member Evan Potter says some people need to change their mindset about deer.

Is poaching or the unlawful shooting of farmed deer a growing problem?

Former NZDFA chair Justin Stevens says he’s heard of cases over the years but doesn’t believe it’s a growing trend.

NZDFA executive member and

Hawke’s Bay deer farmer Evan Potter agrees but says there’s an attitude problem with some people.

“There’s a mindset with some farmers that deer are noxious animals, so if they encounter a stray deer, they shoot first and ask questions later. They wouldn’t do that to (stray) cattle or sheep with tags, so why would a deer with a tag in its ear be any different?”

Potter has experienced that mindset firsthand after two of his hinds escaped and were shot by a neighbour. The neighbour said he was unaware they were farmed deer, but Potter says that would have been obvious if he’d identified his target before pulling the trigger.

“If there’s a tag and evidence of cut velvet, it’s pretty clear.”

In a statement, police said the decision to become involved in the shooting of stray tagged deer was made on a “case by case basis,” and that in a rural area, “landowners do have authority to shoot any ‘pest’ (or animal deemed as such) on their own property. If this happened in a residential or built-up area, there could potentially be a police charge of reckless discharge of a firearm, or similar, but not in the context of a more open, rural area.”





assume they have the right to retrieve the animal. That would need to be negotiated, and NAIT should be notified regardless, Pearse says.

“It’s important to remember throughout any negotiations that the control and responsibility of the escaped deer rests with the owner of the property to which they’re registered.”

What that means is that while the registered owner of the deer might seek compensation for deer that are shot on land they trespass onto, the owner of that land can seek compensation for any damage caused.

“If, for example, a stag escapes during the rut onto a neighbouring farm and mates hinds destined for a high genetic velvet stag, the owner of those hinds would be justified in seeking compensation,” Pearse says.

“It can get complicated.”

Calculating compensation for damage caused is best handled with the involvement of an impartial third party, such as a deer agent. They can help verify ownership and assess stock values and compensation, he says.

In summary, the problem of escaped deer can be complicated and time consuming but resolved with goodwill.



**GOODWILL NEEDED:**  
Former DINZ producer manager Tony Pearse says cooperation resolves in most situations any issues with stray tagged deer.

## Zooming in on elk

The basics and market opportunities of elk and wapiti were covered off nicely in an August Zoom forum hosted by the Elk & Wapiti Society (EWS). About 15 people tuned in to the discussion facilitated by Sam Elder, with input from Mountain River’s John Sadler and Rob Millar, and farmers Jesse Saunders (Southland) and Scott Hassall (North Canterbury).

Sadler said that over the last 20 years Mountain River had developed a niche market in the USA top end food service industry but in recent years the market and elk cuts had broadened from loin cuts to include ground elk (mince) and steaks.

Generally the elk product attracted a premium price in comparison to venison, and the USA was “keen on more elk” so long as it fulfilled elk credentials as defined by consumers

“We need to respect what a North American consumer thinks an elk is - a big animal that sounds and looks like an elk.”

NZ exporters to the US must be able to satisfy American regulations around the definition of elk. Rob Millar said Mountain River required a first-cross or stronger producing a 65kg-plus but ideally 70 - 95kgCW.

Sadler said about 8% of Mountain River throughput was heavier-weight elk and wapiti and there was opportunity to grow that.

Elk stud breeder Dave Lawrence said there was “no free lunch” or shortcuts to maximising growth in elk.

“If you want them to perform you have to feed them.”

Jesse Saunders and Scott Hassall offered management advice based on their own experience.

EWS president Grant Hasse said the Zoom discussion was a new channel the society was trying, to help farmers who were considering or new to farming elk and wapiti.

“We’ve been trying to interact with farmers and let them know that we are here to help them with information.”

A second Zoom discussion on the health and productivity of elk/wapiti is planned for September. Other sessions on genetics and growing weaners for maximum productivity could be run depending on demand. To find out more email or register, email [samanthaelderah@gmail.com](mailto:samanthaelderah@gmail.com) ■

## Industry input needed

The Research Advisory Panel is seeking industry input to help shape the 2025 Research Plan.

Input is invited from stakeholders along the farmed deer supply chain – farmers, processors, marketers, transporters, vets - on everyday challenges or opportunities that could benefit from scientific investigation and solutions.

Email your suggestions to [research@deernz.org](mailto:research@deernz.org) or discuss them with your local DFA representative.

Contributors will go into a draw for a complimentary two day registration to the 50-Year Celebration Conference in Queenstown in 2025.

**42<sup>ND</sup> NATIONAL VELVET AND TROPHY ANTLER COMPETITION**

JUDGING: 13<sup>th</sup> December | AWARDS NIGHT: 14<sup>th</sup> December

Jane Campbell, Entries and Events Coordinator  
027 347 8926 | [southlanddeerbranch@gmail.com](mailto:southlanddeerbranch@gmail.com)  
Bruce Paterson, Competition Chairman | 027 344 3629

**NZDFA**  
SOUTHLAND BRANCH

# Stag sale calendar 2024/25

Date	Time	Client	Location (South/North island)
Wednesday, 11 December 2024	11:00 AM	Fairlight Stn Stag Sale	Garston, SI
Wednesday, 11 December 2024	1:30 PM	Ruapehu Red Deer	Taihape, NI
Friday, 13 December 2024	1:00 PM	Peel Forest (Forresters) Stag Sale	Peel Forest, SI
Monday, 16 December 2024	1:30 PM	Forest Road Farm Deer	Tikokino, NI
Tuesday, 17 December 2024	TBC	Crowley/Tower Farm	Hamilton, NI
Wednesday, 18 December 2024	1:30 PM	FJ Ramsey	Rarewhakaaitu, NI
Wednesday, 8 January 2025	12:00 PM	Foveran Deer Park	Kurow, SI
Wednesday, 8 January 2025	6:00 PM	Ardleigh Deer	Geraldine, SI
Thursday, 9 January 2025	10:30 AM	Raincliff Station, Wapiti	Pleasant Point, SI
Thursday, 9 January 2025	2:30 PM	Edendale Deer	Mt Somers / Ashburton, SI
Thursday, 9 January 2025	6:30 PM	Rothsay Deer	Methven, SI
Friday, 10 January 2025	1:00 PM	Peel Forest Estate	Peel Forest, SI
Friday, 10 January 2025	4:30 PM	Deer Genetics NZ Deer Sale	Geraldine, SI
Saturday, 11 January 2025	12:00 PM	Black Forest Park	Outram, SI
Saturday, 11 January 2025	6:00 PM	Brock Deer	Gore, SI
Sunday, 12 January 2025	12:30 PM	Arawata Deer	Pinebush, SI
Sunday, 12 January 2025	5:30 PM	Altrive Deer	Riversdale, SI
Monday, 13 January 2025	2:00 PM	Wilkins Farming Stag Sale	Athol, SI
Tuesday, 14 January 2025	1:00 PM	Littlebourne Wapiti	Browns, SI
Tuesday, 14 January 2025	3:30 PM	Tikana Wapiti	Browns, SI
Wednesday, 15 January 2025	1:00 PM	Clachanburn Elk	Ranfurly, SI

## Longtime investors in deer technology

Wilkins Farming Co has a 45-year track record in deer farming backed with applied technology to prove the productive worth of the deer we breed and sell.

Our deer have been recorded on Deer Select since its inception in 2005, and for more than 20 years we've EID recorded, DNA tested, and eye muscle scanned to make sure we deliver red deer with proven and superior production credentials.

Our deer breeding programme has multiply key strategic lines with a focus on high growth rate European reds for venison, and maternal English/German reds for dual purpose venison and velvet production.

Our European genetics continue to push production boundaries, a good example is Jameson who at 15-months weighed in at 219kg and recorded and EMA of 48cm<sup>2</sup>. Our young maternal sire Falco (sired by Rock Me) is a perfect example of an outstanding venison and velvet sire achieving 188 kgs at 15 months, an EMA of 41cm<sup>2</sup> and an impressive 9 kgs of velvet at 3 years.

Invest in your deer farming future by choosing proven European red deer or maternal, dual-purpose venison sires. ■

*Advertorial supplied.*

### Mike Wilkins

027 249 93171

[wilkinsfarming.co.nz/deer-venison-velvet](http://wilkinsfarming.co.nz/deer-venison-velvet)

### South Island sale:

13 January 2025 @ 2pm

65 Harvey Road, SH6 between Five Rivers and Athol







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2PM

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# RAP seeks input

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

The Research Advisory Panel (RAP) is seeking farmer, processor and wider industry input on science research priorities.

“We want to get the right channels in place to get farmer and industry views on science research priorities,” RAP chair Danette McKeown says.

“We also want feedback on what science extension should look like, and how we are best to share the results of the science in a practical and meaningful way.”

DINZ has a website page dedicated to research, but the RAP wants more direct pathways for input and discussion on what the industry regards as important and transformative science projects.

McKeown said a starting point was a closer working relationship with NZDFA, which will include a discussion and feedback session at October’s Branch Chairs meeting.



**BALANCED:** The RAP is striving to benefit the wider industry by recommending a balanced mix of science projects, chair Danette McKeown says.

**“We want to make sure that we capture and build on the good systems and science of the past and align that with our strategy for the future.”**

The RAP has met three times and considered 12 proposed research projects, based on their alignment with industry needs. The RAP has recommended a research plan for 2024/25 to DINZ board’s research committee, which has agreed with all of the recommendations and included the cost of eight projects in the proposed budget.

DINZ policy and research manager Emil Murphy says the group is “taking shape” and moving with a measured approach.

“We want to make sure that we capture and build on the good systems and science of the past and align that with our strategy for the future.”

Science projects already underway include matching deer behaviour according to landscape; velvet composition and invitro immune function of velvet harvested at different times; and quantitative genomics, which would feed through in more robust breed values for Deer Select. These and the other currently RAP-recommended projects fall under one of three focus areas: Tomorrow’s Deer, velvet functionality, and velvetting harvest management.

Tomorrow’s Deer is a long-standing R&D focus due to the industry-wide benefits it brought, Murphy says. It was based around AgResearch Invermay’s ‘science’ deer herd and genetics-

based breeding programme, and the research outcomes were helping breeders, farmers and marketers produce better deer and products for the future.

Velvet functionality looks at the extraction and use of functional components in velvet for use in value-added products. This had the potential to grow deer velvet exports using science-based evidence to promote the health benefits of New Zealand velvet, Murphy says.

Velvetting harvest management, the third main area of R&D, was about supporting and enhancing animal welfare standards in line with operating guidelines that were practical, effective and appropriate for deer.

McKeown says there are other R&D focus areas – venison and co-products, methane emissions and mitigations, market research, and the environment. The group would assess and consider projects in line with these priorities while maintaining a balance of research to benefit the whole industry.

Murphy anticipates total deer industry research expenditure for 2024 – 2025 at just over a million dollars. There could be an added contribution from AgResearch, which is under review both as part of the organisation’s internal strategy review and as part of a national science system funding review. ■

The RAP was formed earlier this year to help align DINZ science with strategy. As well as recommending research priorities and projects to a DINZ board research committee, its role is to propose an annual research plan, monitor ongoing research projects, and evaluate completed research projects.

The RAP members were chosen by NZDFA and DINZ to ensure a mix of industry knowledge and perspectives. The members are Danette McKeown (chair), a deer farmer with a background in environmental science; Alastair Nicol, a retired academic with a long history in deer research; Sharon McIntyre, geneticist, Deer Select manager and deer/dairy deer farmer; Hawke’s Bay deer farmer and vet Richard Hilson; Southland deer farmer and vet Dave Lawrence, and AgResearch sector manager Megan Skiffington.

Skiffington is impressed with the collective level and range of experience of group members.

“There is plenty of high quality, practical thinking, which means that the science proposals are being put through the wringer in terms of whether the money invested will create relevant solutions for farmers and the industry to use,” she says.



# Forest Road Farm joins Deer Select

Forest Road Farm – NZ Red Deer, is now officially part of Deer Select!

This milestone move will give us and our clients a reference point on where individual sires sit within our herd for certain traits, and over time will provide comparative data with other herds on Deer Select. The move also means that we have proven data to make the best breeding decisions. For us, velvet antler style - and not just velvet weight – is a key breeding outcome but we're careful to balance this attribute with temperament, body constitution, health and growth.

We are continually investing in new genetics, while also retaining top sires from our own breeding programme. Our homebred sire *Amisfield* continues to leave progeny with velvet of outstanding style and weight, including *Heisenberg* – look out for the first of his daughters this sales season.

Several years of DNA profiling means we can confidently identify our best producing females and family groups. This year we had an extremely successful embryo transfer programme with an average of 10 viable embryos per donor hind! We look forward to delivering this progeny to the market in the coming seasons.

One of the most rewarding aspects of our deer breeding business is the feedback we get from clients telling us how our animals and genetics are performing in various environments throughout the

country. We value and appreciate this feedback and keep it in mind as we evolve and finetune our breeding programme.

We're passionate about breeding red deer and we're equally passionate about enhancing Forest Road's unique and special environment. In our view, responsible and effective environmental management is not just about regulatory box ticking. The various mitigations and enhancements we've rolled out were undertaken to improve both the environmental and economical sustainability of our farming business. Before implementing, we've given thought on how these projects will be practically achieved and how they will positively impact stock management, animal welfare, biodiversity, and aesthetics.

Spring has well and truly sprung, and the velvet is growing! It's a great time of the year even more so given the promising news about continued frozen velvet access into China. A huge thanks to Rhys and the Deer Industry New Zealand team for the behind-the-scenes negotiations to allow deer farmers to do what they do best – produce premium venison and velvet in an ethical, sustainable and financially rewarding manner!

Grant and Sally Charteris, Forest Road Farm – NZ Red Deer ■  
*Advertorial supplied.*



## NORTH ISLAND VELVET & HARD ANTLER COMPETITION (NIVC) 30th November 2024 – Napier Sailing Club



CALLING ALL NORTH ISLAND VELVET & HARD ANTLER GROWERS

Thank you to PGG Wrightson, Provelvo Coop and CK Import / Export for being our main sponsors again this year. Good luck to all entrants and hope you can make the awards dinner for a great entertaining night out. Dinner tickets only can be booked via an entry form \$80.00 per person or direct with Craig Hocken email: [chocken@inspire.net.nz](mailto:chocken@inspire.net.nz)

- As you begin to cut this season's velvet, please consider keeping back your best heads to support & enter them in this year's NIVC competition. The 2024 North Island Velvet & Hard Antler Competition awards dinner is on Saturday 30th November 2024. 2024 marks the 30th year of the NIVC competition.
- Viewing will be in Hastings at the Pac N Save Coolstore 1424a Omahu Road, Twyford Hastings at 4.00pm.
- Hawkes Bay Velvet will be out on display at 4.00pm sharp followed by the NIVC Velvet and Hard Antler 4.30pm.
- Drinks and nibbles will follow in Napier at the Napier Sailing Club from 5.15pm onwards. Awards Dinner at approx. 6.45pm. This year's awards dinner will be a joint Hawkes Bay and the North Island Velvet Competition. Please ensure your dinner ticket is booked by 20 Nov 2024 for catering purposes.
- Velvet & Hard Antler needs to be in your local collector's hands for delivery to the competition by Wednesday 27th November 2024 no later than 5.00pm. See local collection contacts below. Note payments for entries must also be paid by 27th November 2024.

Main Sponsors:



Entry forms will be posted out to all previous entrants. If you have not entered before and would like an entry form or other competition details, please contact Craig Hocken; or look on the Deer Industry NZ webpage and download a pdf for printing or a word document for emailing to enter.

Craig Hocken: 0274 576 388 or email [chocken@inspire.net.nz](mailto:chocken@inspire.net.nz)

The following for your local Coordinators for velvet & hard antler collection:

**Central Regions (Wellington, Manawatu, Wanganui, Taihape and Taranaki):**

- Craig Hocken – 0274 576 388
- email: [chocken@inspire.net.nz](mailto:chocken@inspire.net.nz)

**Te Awamutu/Waikato–King Country:**

- Ross Moore – 07 888 1449, 022 0599 005
- Email: [rmmoore@farmside.co.nz](mailto:rmmoore@farmside.co.nz)

**Hawke's Bay, Gisborne, Wairarapa:**

- Grant Charteris – 027 230 8531
- email: [grantcharteris@gmail.com](mailto:grantcharteris@gmail.com)

**COMPETITION**



# Advance Parties facilitators gather at High Peak

Cameron Frecklington, *Deer Industry News* writer

On 21-22 August, facilitators for the Advance Parties (AP) gathered at High Peak Station in Canterbury to build their understanding of integrated farm planning and all that involves, along with an opportunity to build their facilitation skills.

The event was organised by Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) and saw nine AP facilitators and two AP lead farmers gather to hone their existing skills and learn some new ones. It also allowed DINZ to get an update on where the Advance Parties are currently at, what they are thinking, and what tools and resources can be worked on to provide support.

The AP groups have proven to be a strong mechanism for DINZ to support deer farmers improving their farm businesses with the support of a facilitator and subject matter experts. Many of these groups have been going for ten years, largely through the initial support of the Passion2Profit programme.

“The time spent with the AP facilitators was a great opportunity to gain a further understanding of the AP groups,” DINZ industry capability manager John Ladley says, “as well as what is driving them to remain successful and ensure that the facilitators have the tools and resources to support their groups.”

“It’s always a pleasure to visit a property like High Peak and hear their story. Such properties provide inspiration and demonstrate what can be achieved with foresight and having an open mind to seeing opportunities.”

On the first day, Hamish Guild spoke about how to develop a flexible and resilient farming system, manage a farm within the environment, identify and address pinch points and challenges, integrate a multi-business farm, and more. The session was facilitated by Wayne Allan, of Allan Agricultural.

There was also a classroom element, with more on integrated farm planning and environmental considerations, a presentation from John Sadler of Mountain River venison, and a DINZ market update. The second day had a focus on facilitator skills development, which was led by Scarlatti’s Denise Bewsell.

“Coming together as facilitators was a great opportunity to reconnect and rekindle the energy of the Advance Parties,” says Lyndon Matthews, facilitator for the North Canterbury Advance Party. “My impression is that Advance Parties are still going strong in most areas, and I believe that they are an extremely valuable, and perhaps under-utilised, resource for the deer industry.”

On what makes a good facilitator, Matthews was quick to draw a distinction between facilitators and consultants.

“A good facilitator is someone who remembers that first and foremost they are there to facilitate, not be a consultant. The mantra of ‘Farmers learn best from other farmers’ still holds true – the skill of the facilitator is to engage all the participants at a meeting.”

Setting the agenda, keeping everything on track (timekeeping is essential), leaving time for subjects to breathe and conversation to happen organically, holding people to account by setting action plans, and following up with well-kept minutes are all part of the job.

DINZ environmental stewardship manager Luka Jansen was there in a support role, and she was impressed by the underappreciated role that facilitators play.

“For me, I came away with utmost respect for our Advance Party facilitators. The role of a good facilitator cannot be underestimated. In my role, the key to good policy decisions relies on gathering a range of different ideas and opinions. An experienced facilitator ensures group meetings are fluid, respectful and meaningful while remaining impartial to different views. Ultimately, this is key to finding good solutions to the challenges farmers face.”

When asked what the future holds for Advance Parties, Ladley acknowledged both the value of the groups but also how they should be utilised going forward.

“We have approximately 190 farmers engaged in AP groups that have shown the benefit of working together to improve their own farm businesses and support each other,” says Ladley.

“DINZ is supportive of the continuation of these groups and their whole-of-farm approach, so the question is more about how DINZ can continue to support them in the changing environment we are in – socially, economically and environmentally – as well as how these groups can best share what they have learned so others may also benefit.” ■



GREAT VIEWS: High Peak Station was a picture-perfect venue for the Advance Parties gathering.





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# New chapter

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

New Zealand venison is in the starting blocks for a new European chapter, but leading off on the right foot will mean ironing out supply and price fluctuations, *Deer Industry News* Zealand (DINZ) chef Shannon Campbell says.

His comments follow recent conversations with several importers of our venison. All mentioned the short supply of products and how that has created a volatile market causing some importers – but by no means all- to step back from investment in long-term promotional projects. In the meantime they’re shoring up what is available to existing customers and pausing efforts to acquire new ones because of the uncertainty around supply.

Positive messaging about projected increase in our farmed deer numbers would help restore confidence, Campbell says, but building numbers will take time and in the meantime “we find ourselves in a flat promotional market until supply balances out.”

European importers are aware of the developing competition for our venison in USA and China, and some are concerned how this trend will further restrict European supply.

“The volatility in price and supply makes it a problematic product

category for some. Currently it’s good relationships and years of collective goodwill that are carrying us through.”

Campbell acknowledges that he represents NZ producers in Europe, and that profitability needs to increase for deer farmers back home. With stronger pricing signals to producers, importers should start to see an increase in supply.

But the supply headwinds do have an upside.

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## “We find ourselves in a flat promotional market until supply balances out.”

“It means that they (importers and distributors) are selective about whom they supply. This is subtly shifting the status of our venison to the more desirable ‘aspirational’ product sector and ties in well with the Nature’s Superpower brand.”

He says farmers should be encouraged that our venison is regarded as a high-quality, premium product.

“Demand is there, and importers are still making substantial efforts to support the product. We could definitely be selling a lot more of it.”

## Importer impressions

European New Zealand venison importers Henk de Graaf, Schoonderwoerd Vlees; and Christian Klughardt and Marco Kuhnemund directors of German company Klughardt GmbH importers were among those quizzed by Shannon Campbell about their perception and the barriers to growing the market for our venison.

Both businesses were complimentary about the quality of our product, describing it as “high-quality” and “excellent and natural.” Henk de Graaf said it was positioned above wild game because of its tenderness and mild taste, shelf life and packaging.

“Customers who are used to working with it don’t switch easily or at all. It’s a premium product, but because its price is compared to European game it’s not always easy to achieve a premium price for it,” he said.

But by far the biggest issue is the supply and price volatility.

Price increases over the last three years, and the surging price differential between chilled and frozen product is a huge barrier to growing sales, Christian Klughardt says.



**HIGH QUALITY:** European importers like our product but not the volatile supply and pricing.



Campbell at the recent Fine Foods in Cologne, Germany



Price swings have made it “nearly impossible” to make long-term sales, and customers have switched to European venison which has “much improved over the last five years.”

The pricing differential between chilled and frozen used to be €1/kg but now it is €5-6/kg.

Henk de Graaf says when prices hit a certain level customers start looking elsewhere, either a cheaper cut of our venison, from a different country of origin, or an entirely different protein.

He encourages New Zealand marketers to keep looking at ways to maximise cut utilisation “so that we can return more on the whole carcass.”

“New Zealand in return needs to focus on supplying product based

on demand,” he says, and notes how changing weather patterns in Europe – warmer temperatures over the winter – are shortening the traditional consumption period for venison.

“People will continue to eat red meat and New Zealand venison can be part of that diet, but it would be good to step out of what has been the traditional consumption period.”

And we need to keep telling the New Zealand venison story.

“Consumers increasingly want to know what they are eating and where it has come from. New Zealand has a great story, better than any other country exporting meat. We need to bring that understanding to the end consumers, they need to know about the work and care put into raising animals for top-quality product.” ■

Price and supply volatility in the commodity business is nothing new for the red meat industry, Mountain River marketing manager John Sadler says.

But an added complication in recent years with venison, and especially the European chilled season, is the shortened window for production. October to December is the traditional window for European consumption of venison and game meats.

“There’s always been a jockeying for position during the off season and because of the seasonal nature it’s ripe for price speculation and volatility,” Sadler says.

But the ability of New Zealand exporters to supply chilled venison in the window has become more difficult due to the movement of deer finishing to hill country areas where the growing season is later. Adding to the problem recently is the longer sea transit time to Europe due to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea forcing some ships to reroute around the southern tip of Africa.

“Deer are achieving processing weights later,” he says.

“We used to ship up to the first week of November, but now we have to get shipments away in mid-October to make the pre-Christmas market.”

The upshot of the shortened production season is strong price competition to get enough animals to supply the European chilled market.

“Our production season is not ideally aligned with that seasonal window,” he says.

However, some marketers are making progress in moving away from the seasonal business. He says Mountain River has focused on the Scandinavian market, setting up in-market distribution and developing year-round sales of a Mountain River-branded frozen range. Supply for the programme comes from deer processed at optimal time from November to June. This project is supported by DINZ 2021 Marketing Innovation Fund. Other key year-round markets for Mountain River include the USA and China.

Also, there are early signs that the number of breeding hinds



**NOT A GOOD FIT:** Our chilled venison production season doesn't align well with Europe's seasonal demand window, Mountain River's John Sadler says.

has bottomed out and numbers will increase which will help boost overall supply in coming years. Another positive is more longer-term contracts to secure stock which will improve supply stability and bolster the confidence of importers.

DINZ chief executive Rhys Griffiths acknowledges the difficulty and challenge in striking the “sweet spot” in commodity pricing.

“Striking the balance where prices and returns meet the needs of both producers and customers is always the tricky bit. If prices are too low, producers lose confidence and reduce deer numbers, but if it’s too high it’s our end customers - the overseas importers - who walk away.”

He also acknowledges the need to work harder at differentiating our products to command a sustainable premium that benefits the whole supply chain. John Sadler agrees and says more can be done to differentiate our farmed venison from the seasonal game product that Europeans are familiar with. But that requires a lot of investment and long-term commitment.

“It’s not easy and it’s not the fault of one party (NZ exporter or European importer)...it’s difficult.”

Silver Fern Farms (SFF) global sales operation manager Glen MacLennan says a combination of market diversification and in-market development will help reduce the “boom and bust” nature of the European market. MacLennan, who oversees SFF’s global sales of lamb, beef and venison says the highly seasonal nature of the European market makes it difficult to align supply with demand. However, diversification into China, North America and South East Asia should improve stability.

“Diverting some of the slower moving venison products, especially leg cuts, to these markets will reduce inventories and the price fluctuations. It will create stability and with that comes confidence from importers to invest in the product,” he says.

Hand-in-hand with market diversification is the need for ongoing in-market development.

“As part of telling the story of New Zealand venison it’s important to demonstrate the versatility of it to change mindsets.”

DINZ chef Shannon Campbell is doing this to great effect, MacLennan says, a recent example was Fine Food Days festival in Cologne where Campbell inspired Michelin-starred and other top chefs with NZ venison cooking tips. Exporter-importer investment and collaboration in events such as Fine Food Days was needed to drive demand for NZ venison, he said.



# No quarter spared

Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* writer

US consumers now have access to a First Light natural vitamin supplement made from deer co-products, which boast a clear advantage over human health supplements containing synthetic – and therefore less bioavailable – vitamins.

This is just one of many successes in the ongoing campaign to extract maximum value for producers from the “fifth quarter.” This category covers everything from blood and offals to pizzles, sinews, tails, bones and hides, plus items such as heads and hocks.



**PIZZLES PLEASE:** More pizzles than you could shake a stick at. Pizzles, along with sinews and tails, make up about 6–7 percent of the value of a deer carcass on average, Mountain River’s John Sadler says.

A perennial gripe from some farmers is that they are paid only based on the hot carcass weight, while the above-mentioned co-products are not covered by the schedule price received. This, however, is not true. All the venison processors spoken to by *Deer Industry News* said the schedule price does indeed incorporate the value of these co-products, with much better utilisation of the fifth quarter for deer than for other stock classes.

Most hesitated to say how much of the total carcass value was made up by co-products, not because they were being secretive but because there’s such a complex array of products and supply lines. Mountain River venison marketing manager John Sadler was prepared to venture that it was in the region of 20 percent, give or take. He said deer, both red and wapiti, yield relatively high-value co-products.

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**The schedule price incorporates the value of co-products, with much better utilisation of the fifth quarter for deer than for other stock classes.**

There have been challenges for this sector, which has been volatile at times. Over the past 12 years, combined export

revenue for co-products (including hides) has varied between \$58.9 million during the 2017/18 pet food ‘bubble’ before plunging to only \$21 million a year later. By last year, the combined value had recovered to just under \$30 million.

Despite all the ups and downs, processors and those working directly with co-products are positive about prospects for this segment.

Alliance Group’s Terry O’Connell (sales manager exports) and Katrina Allan (venison sales manager) said co-products were an established raw material source for traditional Chinese medicine, although access to that market was complicated for them by having only one of two deer processing plants listed for that country. While acknowledging there were headwinds for market access, they were still optimistic about the long-term prospects for deer co-products. Relatively low deer numbers meant it was more difficult maintaining a reliable supply, they said.

Justin Lawrence, Silver Fern Farms group manager fifth quarter, said that thanks to the niche exotic nature of deer, and the value of their co-products for the traditional Chinese medicine market, they are more valuable than beef or lamb co-products.

He said Silver Fern Farms wanted to optimise value for every part of the animal and fairly distribute this to those who create the value.

“We do this with new product technology, new markets, new services and products. The ultimate aim is a fair, stable return to deer farmers.”

Rob Kidd, Duncan NZ Venison general manager marketing and operations, said the company was not sitting on its hands regarding co-products.

“We’re always chasing potential.”

That said, there were challenges thanks to intense competition at times for some high-value co-products, coupled with relatively low volumes and fluctuating supply.

“That can make it hard to build a steady market,” he added.

Duncan NZ is undeterred, however, and is dedicated to harvesting the entire carcass to return the maximum value possible for all parts.

When the 2012 Deer Industry Conference featured deer skins and their high-end uses, the sector was riding high,

earning nearly \$23 million that year. Following that, the value of hides dropped by nearly three-quarters, recovering slightly to \$8.6 million last year.

Hawke's Bay-based Chris Baty of CBEX handles around 20 percent of all New Zealand deer hides, which leave the country either salted or pickled. He focuses most attention on traditional markets in Japan, China, Germany and Austria, where deer hides are still valued – for lederhosen in the European countries.

“You need to look after and hold onto those markets,” he said.

Baty said leather is not so fashionable at the moment, which has helped depress prices. In addition, the processing of deer hides uses a lot of water and some strong chemicals, which also counts against the end product.

Nonetheless, it's a steady business, and Baty said that apart from the occasional hoof damage, deer hides are generally less prone to damage than sheep skins.

Silver Fern Farms' Justin Lawrence is more bullish about prospects for deer hides and their unique pebbled leather.

“Demand far exceeds supply, and as there is no long-term inventory, this creates pressure on supply to fulfil consumer demand. We are fortunate to have capable people at Silver Fern Farms, like John McNeil, who are playing the long game to maintain value for farmers.”

Another business that handles large volumes of deer co-products is Alpine Deer NZ, which has two facilities: one at Luggate and the other – the former Lowe Products – near Tauranga. Managing director Hugh Signal said the relatively tight supply of co-products keeps some pressure on price.

“Maintaining a sustainable supply is crucial,” he said.

He's optimistic about the product possibilities for co-products in areas such as healthy food, beverages and cosmetics. Alpine Deer supplies various niche markets, focusing on ethnic Chinese consumers, around the world. The company does primary and secondary processing, making many products in powder form.

“We can take it so far and then leave space for others to add further value,” he said.



NEW: This new USA-bound supplement range from First Light uses deer fifth quarter products.

Signal added that only those who added value should be in the supply chain, and “not those who only add cost.”

He's happy that the company has a good relationship with its farmer suppliers and acknowledges that mutual trust and understanding are vital.

John Sadler said Mountain River's Asian co-products – the pizzles, sinews and tails – are sold through Alpine Deer, with whom they've had a long-term relationship.

“These products are especially significant. They make up about 35 percent of the value of the co-products and contribute about 6–7 percent of the total value of the deer.

“Being a China-listed plant puts us at a big advantage,” he added.

Noting the farmer gripes about not seeing co-products listed on kill sheets, he said it would be simply impracticable.

“You don't separate out leg and tenderloin, so you wouldn't separate out co-products either.”

Like others, he sees further potential for value in co-products.

First Light owner and group managing director Gerard Hickey said the newly launched vitamin supplement in the United States is a good example of leveraging the value US consumers see in products with an elk component.

“The role of elk in our products is well-recognised and valued there.”

That value is extending to a high-value pet food ‘treat’ product into the burgeoning US pet food industry.

Hickey said that following Brexit, First Light had refocused from the United Kingdom to the United States and was now following through the entire value chain in that country. They are building markets in the West Coast states and Texas, represented in about 1,000 high-end retail stores (similar in style to New Zealand's Moore Wilson's) and their own restaurants, as well as a significant online business.

“There are no middlemen in our US value chain for deer products,” Hickey said. “We are working directly through restaurants and retailers.”

And like his counterparts in other deer product businesses, he is upbeat about the future for co-products.

“We want to keep generating more value for non-meat products.” ■



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

## Diverse lineup

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Diversification and diversity were the takeaway words from this year's Next Generation event, based in and around Palmerston North. The 50 millennial and younger attendees were a diverse lot, ranging from university and Smedley students to a couple of stock agents, and farmers. The farm-based attendees ranged from the new and inexperienced to those in lease and equity partnerships.

Over the two days, diversification was explored at several levels. The linking theme of the farm visits on Day One – to the Adlam family's deer wintering barn (see page 28) followed by Mike Humphrey's Deer Farmers' Environmental Award-winning farm – was how change and diversification had led to a system in-sync with their respective environmental and farming goals.

**“The thing with deer is that they can be farmed in a low labour system, so there is opportunity for diversification.”**

On Day Two, a visit to Venison Packers Feilding and a presentation by First Light's Matt Gibson provided insight into the many employment opportunities along the venison processing and marketing chain. In the afternoon classroom session, the diverse pathways into deer farming, as well as diversification in deer and multi-species systems, were topics delved into by Next Gen facilitator and Baker Ag consultant Matt Carroll.



**THINK TANK:** Next Gen groups did a SWOT analysis of possible diversifications on a flat land, hill country, multi-species and single species systems.

New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association (NZDFA) chair Mark McCoard says the organising team of this year's event was keen to highlight the different career opportunities within the deer industry, as well as the diverse pathways into deer farming.

“The thing with deer is that they can be farmed in a low labour system, so there is opportunity for diversification.

“We were also keen to get the message across that there is no one pathway into farming,” McCoard said.

### Farming for dough, not for show

Halcombe farmer Mike Humphrey is a good example of someone who has diversified to meet changing markets and environmental regulations. His first love is deer – he's been farming them for 42 years – and to stick with them, he's changed his focus from trading and finishing to trophy and velvet. He used to produce 90,000kg of venison annually in a high input system.

“I was trading and killing 1600 a year, and at any one time could have up to 2000 deer on, but I could see it wasn't sustainable,” he told the Next Gen crowd.

The growing of winter crop, feeding of supplements, and fertiliser required to “load up” the system, plus the increasing difficulty of finding enough sale weaners given the dwindling number of breeding hinds, made it all too difficult and costly. It was also hard on the rolling to steep country.

“It can get pretty ugly in the middle of a wet Manawatu winter and spring feeding out in mud to 1600-odd young deer and another 500 older animals.”



**PROACTIVE:** Mike Humphrey had adapted Green Hill's farming system to better align with the feed growth curve, environmental constraints, and his desire to ease out of farming.



The change meant no more fodder beet and winter crops, and a system better aligned with Green Hill's grass growth curve. It had the added benefit of spreading financial risk across the venison, velvet and trophy markets.

The velvet stags, which will cut about two tonnes this year, were "a piece of cake" to manage once the rut was out of the way, he said.

Humphrey had latched onto carbon farming opportunities. He's collected carbon credits on 18ha of *Pinus radiata* and has another 12ha planted, collecting carbon credits for the first 16 years. He might fence a 20ha gully for wide-spaced poplars leaving space underneath for sheep grazing. The poplars would also have a good foothold, helping prevent erosion in the heads of the gullies while providing extra income from carbon and beautifying the hills.

Next Gen facilitator Matt Carroll said Humphrey had moved with the times to adapt to change and was "farming for dough, not for show." Carroll backed this comment the following day with a comparative financial analysis, which showed Green Hill's economic farm surplus of \$452/ha was comfortably in between the region's Class 4 average of \$515/ha and the across-the-board average of \$361/ha. Green Hill's gross revenue/stock unit of \$153 was slightly below the Class 4 finishing average of \$159, and reflected the farm's greater area of hill and steep country.

"It shows that this property is really pulling its weight," Carroll said.

## Value adding at First Light

Diversification for First Light had meant "doubling down to get greater margins on all pieces [of the carcass]," general manager Matt Gibson said. Examples of nose-to-tail product developments included the use of more fifth quarter components in dog food and treats, cured meat products such as jerky sticks, and micronutrient-based snack foods, which are becoming popular in the United States.

Gibson said there had been geographical market diversification over the last decade, with First Light venison product exports by volume shifting from European dependency (86% in 2006) to a three-way split of the United States (45%), EU (33%) and other countries (23%).



**DOUBLING DOWN:** First Light was developing new value chains and extracting more nose-to-tail value from a venison carcass.

Hand-in-hand with growing venison awareness and demand in the United States was increased demand for NZ elk. American consumers know what elk is, and a lot of the NZ-supplied product is descended from North American elk gifted to New Zealand by American president Theodore Roosevelt in 1905, Gibson said. The increasing throughput of the heavy-weight animals meant First Light was "rewriting the playbook" to define weight, phenotypic and grading specifications.

He said the niche halal market was an exciting development for First Light. It was a retail-focused, high value market based on small red deer supplied from September to June producing a 42–55kg carcass. The animals were generally rising-two-year tail-end or surplus red hinds supplied at a fixed price, which Gibson predicted would hit \$11.50/kg within the next two years.

## Crunching the numbers

The final classroom session had plenty of take-home messages for attendees keen on progressing along the deer farming pathway. The starting point was having the dream and ambition, Carroll said, but that pathway had to stack up financially. Also important: the people involved had to be compatible, have a clear understanding of their respective roles, and agree to the terms of the relationship.

It's a bit like a marriage, Carroll said.

"You have to prove yourself as a desirable person to go into business with."

The how-to and some of the considerations of farm succession, equity partnership and lease arrangements were outlined. Carroll then dissected and compared regional farm survey data with Mike Humphrey's Green Hill's financial performance figures, pointing out the key comparison indicators of farm financial health.

The session was heavy in financial detail, but Carroll said understanding the key drivers of farm profitability, undertaking an accurate data analysis, and getting proper documentation in place were all essential elements of progressing a farming career. ■



**JUGGLING ACT:** Matt Carroll said farming was tough at the moment, but diversification could help. It added complication because it required a bit of juggling and every so often a ball fell.



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# Tick talk

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

At the Next Generation event, Hawke's Bay farmer and vet Richard Hilson delved deep into the problem of tick control in deer.

"They'll always win, but there's a lot you can do other than chemicals to control the problem," he said.

The default used by most farmers was to chemically treat affected deer, but that single line of attack was coming unstuck.

"Those early days of chemical treatments gave you about three to four weeks cover over spring, but I think it's becoming apparent that these chemicals are not working as well as they used to."

Yet farmers keep reaching for the same chemicals, and they keep getting the same results.

"It's a classic case of, 'if you always do what you've always done, you'll always get what you've always got.'"

"If ticks are a genuine annual issue, you need to take a number of steps. Don't just reach for the pour-on."

His message was to use a combination of monitoring, pasture management, and – if need be – chemical treatment of deer.

"It's about knowing when ticks are turning up and knowing what to do once they start appearing."

On-the-ground management is crucial to breaking the life cycle of ticks. Early spring is tick alert time as there is a surge in nymph numbers. They thrive in rough pasture, reeds and rushes, and in high pasture cover areas – common on many deer farms. The longer, stalky growth make it easy for a tick to climb and latch on to a passing deer. The benefits of higher pasture covers for ticks – a microclimate for shelter and humidity – can be broken, however, by reducing pasture cover and height through weed wiping or making silage out of surplus feed.

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**"If ticks are a genuine annual issue, you need to take a number of steps. Don't just reach for the pour-on."**

"When you cut the height you're opening up the pasture and drying out their preferred cover, making it a lot harder for them to survive."

Another solution was the rotational grazing of deer over spring, which knocks back cover to let in light and also brings plenty of feet to trample ticks.

He emphasised that spelling paddocks didn't eliminate ticks because they would happily survive without a livestock host

for a year. And in the absence of livestock, ticks will happily latch onto wildlife such as hares, rabbits, possums and even birds.

## Monitoring

Robust monitoring goes hand-in-hand with effective pasture management in tick control.

"I think that monitoring is really, really important. You've got to monitor, but I think that it's mostly done at velvetting, and that's not enough."

The best monitoring tool was a 'mop-up' mob – a mob of heep or cattle, rotated around problem tick areas in the morning and evening when it was cooler, and ticks were most active. Ticks attach themselves to the sheep or cattle, and inspection of the mob after 5-10 days would reveal the extent of any



**EAR FULL:** Engorged ticks in a deer's ear. An adult tick can suck up to 1ml of blood.

problem. Badly affected animals could be treated before being sent again around paddocks.

“If you’re killing ticks at that time of the year, you’re killing adults that were going to lay eggs. It’s not going to get rid of them but it’s really going to knock back the numbers.”

Hilson said he preferred sheep to cattle for mop-up duties; a mob of 200 sheep was more effective than 40 cattle because they covered more ground faster and had more feet to stamp out ticks. Also, ticks were much harder to see on cattle.

## Treatment

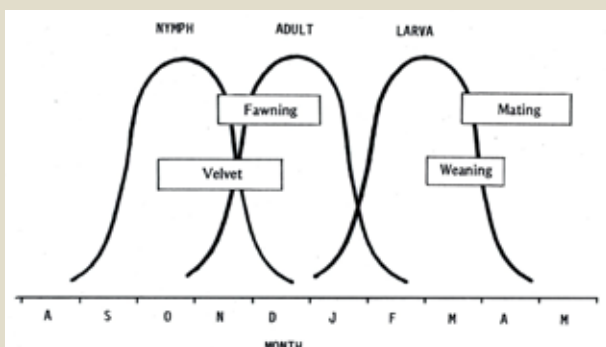
There are a number of different registered treatments for tick control on cattle and sheep, and Hilson is hopeful that another sheep option, Flexolt, will soon be available for use.



TOP DOG: A Jack Russell terrier is Angela McIntyre’s chosen tick indicator. The Ohingaiti farmer sends her dog on monitoring duty around tick-prone paddocks in spring.

## Life cycle

The ticks that infect deer (*Haemaphysalis longicornis*) have a four-stage life cycle, developing from an egg into larvae, nymph and adult. Each phase (aside from the egg stage) attaches to the host, which includes “pretty much any mammal,” including deer, sheep, cattle and humans, Hilson said. Ticks move on and off hosts three times during their life cycle, each time engorging on blood.



Adults lay up to 2000 eggs on the ground during summer, and from late summer to early autumn, the eggs hatch into larvae.

From January to March, the larvae move up pasture, attach to a host, and suck blood. They’re tiny, about the size of a nib from a ballpoint pen. After five days, they drop from the host and moult to become nymphs. By this stage, they are visible to the human eye and easily seen on an animal.

The engorged adults are more easily detected over the summer to the early autumn period, but that is when hinds are fawning and stags rutting, making the yarding of deer for examination impractical.

A complicating factor in control is the parthenogenic nature of female ticks, meaning they can lay viable eggs without fertilisation from a male. That is significant, Hilson said, because the next generation would be genetically resistant to chemical treatments.

Temperature and humidity dictate where ticks live; they struggle in dry and/or cold climates, which explained why they were generally found in the warmer, more humid regions from Marlborough up.

“It’s going to take quite a big swing in our climate before the lower South Island becomes vulnerable to ticks,” he said.

# FAIRLIGHT STATION

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The active ingredient is part of a long-acting treatment for flea and tick control in cats and dogs, recently registered for lice control in sheep.

“It’s not going to be a silver bullet, but it could be another tool. Watch this space.”

Hilson expected that this coming tick season there would be field work to assess Flexolt’s value against ticks in sheep to help define where the product might be used in sheep within a deer farm system.

He stressed that Flexolt should never be used on deer.

Hilson’s final words of advice on tick control were to take a long-term view, make the available options last, and to “keep farming deer!” ■



THE WAITING GAME: An adult tick on the lookout for a passing host.

## Ticking off ticks, Richard Hilson

Tips for identifying problem areas and paddocks:

- where have ticks been a problem before? They are most often an issue in certain paddocks or areas, not an entire farm.
- monitor at the right time of year by eyeballing stock (deer, sheep, cattle), checking the dogs, or dragging a sheet around.
- don’t be complacent. If you’re north of Canterbury, the risk is real.
- don’t panic. If you see the odd tick, don’t overreact – get advice; remain cool, calm and collected

### Pasture control

- Can you do better with grass control? Try more hinds in each paddock at fawning, and a bit more subdivision.
- Try topping or hard grazing with other animals, especially cattle (which will squash some ticks, too).
- Top fawning paddocks before set stocking. Get hinds with fawns moving as soon as the fawns are up and running.
- Control rushes with a mower or weed wiper. They’re easy to nail on anything but hill country, and even if you get rid of some, that will be better than doing nothing

### Pest control

- Hares are a particularly good tick carrier. Shoot them.
- Don’t tolerate free-range goats or a mangy mob of wild sheep. Ticks will get a free ride

### Change stock policy to make more money

- Use cattle or sheep to help control pasture and/or mop up ticks.
- There are different registered products to use on cattle and sheep that can help.

- Work out how a strategic stock trade might make money, while also providing a mob to mop-up. This could be shorn trade lambs in summer, ewes after weaning, or heifers in spring.

### Mix the chemical options used on:

- drenched lambs
- dipped ewes (buy a run-through dip or use a pour-on); and
- dipped cattle.
- Pasture spraying is a last resort but a legitimate option.
- Be strategic, not reactive.



GET IN THE KNOW: Richard Hilson said knowing when ticks are turning up and knowing what to do was important in tick control.

# 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.

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# Hunkering down for good

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

Both the stags and Dwight Adlam are better off from indoor barn wintering at Mangahao Farm.



Photo: Tony Leggett  
**GAME-CHANGER:** The wintering barn has brought big benefits to the farm system, Dwight Adlam says.



**GRUBS UP:** Maize silage is fed in the morning and grass silage at night. It costs about \$1.08 a day to feed a barn-wintered stag. Photo: Dwight Adlam

## Mangahao Farm, Shannon, Manawatu

A diverse velvet, trophy, venison, cattle and sheep trading/finishing system on flats, easy rolling and gully country owned by Kahikatea Trust/Peter Adlam and managed by Dwight Adlam.

- 108 masl
- Rainfall: 1800 mm
- 180ha (145ha deer fenced)

Stock wintered 2024: 2881 SU (15.5/ha)

Deer SU: 2425

Cattle SU: 357.5

20 MA hinds

55 R1 bulls

3 R2 in-fawn hinds

22 R2 heifers

40 R1 hinds

**Sheep: 98.4**

235 R1 & R2 stags

96 2T ewes

510 MA velvet stags

3 rams

5 Sire stags

On the first stop of the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association (NZDFA) Next Generation event, Adlam said that the barn wintering of 250 velvet and trophy stags had been a game-changer for their deer farming business. One of the big wins was an estimated \$6,650 saving in winter feed costs due to less wastage.

"It's almost 100 percent utilisation," Adlam said.

That compared with an estimated feed utilisation of 75 % for paddock-fed stags.

Next Generation facilitator and BakerAg consultant Matt Carroll quantified the improved feed utilisation indoors, explaining that a barn-wintered stag ate about 4kg/DM a day compared to the 5.3kg/DM intake of a paddock-wintered stag. He calculated that the 1.33kg/DM reduction in wastage saved 33,250kg/DM over the 100 days of feeding. That saved an estimated \$6,650, based on a 20c/kg/DM production cost for grass and maize silage.

Adlam is in his second season of wintering stags in a kitset shed. The main motivation was to reduce mud and get "mouths off the paddocks" to reduce pressure on the clay-based soils which are prone to waterlogging. Feeding some of the deer indoors had reduced the damage to farm tracks and feed areas within paddocks due to fewer trips with tractors and feedout wagons.

There was a lot of learning in the first year, especially about feed quality. However, the indications were that the diet and sheltered, spacious environment was ticking the right boxes, the key indicator being earlier velvet. Last year velvet harvest started three to four weeks earlier than the previous year.

Matt Carroll said an obvious sign of the stags comfort factor was that they hadn't grown winter coats.



“They’re not having to put energy into staying warm and the energy saved goes to velvet production.”

Mangahao wintered about 15.5su/ha which sounded on the “high side,” Carroll said. However wintering the stags indoors made this possible and effectively reduced the outdoor stocking rate to about 10su/ha. He added that less stock on winter paddocks potentially kicked off spring growth earlier. The barn was also a multi-purpose asset, used for rearing beef-cross calves once the stags went back outside in September.

“That’s an important consideration in building a barn like this, you need to think about how else you can utilise it.”

But for many the big question was whether the cost of the barn had improved overall returns from deer. Carroll estimated that it cost about 90 cents a day to barn winter a stag based on the construction and interest costs (\$280,000 @ 8% ) spread across 250 stags.

“So 90 cents a day per stag is what it costs indoors but you’ve got to factor in what benefits that cost brings.”

Velvet income was the obvious benefit although it was difficult to say after one completed season by how much production and income was increased. However, the other benefits to factor in were the winter savings in labour, less damage to paddocks over winter, earlier spring growth, and income generating opportunities.

In summary he said the \$280,000 cost of the shed was a “big chunk of money” but it was a feasible resource taking into account the estimated 30-year lifespan of the building.

Carroll looked at the opportunity cost of the \$280,000 – buying more flat land at an estimated \$30,000 to \$40,000/ha. The extra seven to nine hectares would not create the same opportunity for stock intensification that the shed had created, nor the welfare and production benefits, he said. ■



**DETAIL:** The soak hole for the run-off from the barn floor. The total wintering barn cost of \$280,000 included construction, internal fit-out, concrete feeding strip and drainage. Photo: Tony Leggett



**LESS IS MORE:** Barn wintering costs 12 cents a day more than outdoor wintering but there is less feed wastage, less time feeding out, and less paddock damage. Photo: Dwight Adlam

## Deer at Mangahao

The Adlam family bought Mangahao farm eight years ago and over the last seven years have deer fenced 47 kilometres. They are achieving some impressive results from their velvet and trophy stags. The total velvet harvest is about 4.5 t/pa. Last year the across-the-board velvet harvest average, including regrowth was 6.6kg. Venison income is from the 120 stags culled annually. About 50 seven-year-plus stags are grown out for trophy outfitters.

## Spacious

Dwight Adlam designed the barn based on ideas from a field trip to Southland, in particular Tony and Michelle Robert’s wintering barn (Deer Industry News, March 2023).

The total cost of the barn was about \$280,000 including internal pen fit-out, the concrete feeding strip, drainage and water troughs.

The 60m by 18m deep building accommodates 250 stags separated by age group into five 12m by 18m pens. A 300ml covering of sawdust and woodchips is spread across a metal gravel base creating a free-draining bed for the deer.

Each pen has a water trough at the back of the shed, which in hindsight would have been better placed in the middle to make it easier to see when it needed refilling, Adlam said.

The transition indoors starts at velvet regrowth with separation of the stags into age group mobs of 50. The mobs are progressively grazed in downsized paddocks from 1ha so that by the time they move indoors they’re comfortable in a pen. The R2s and R3s were brought in about mid-May and the remaining mobs over early June.

Maize silage is fed in the morning and grass silage at night on the concrete strip outside the pens, easily accessed by the stags. The silage is made on another Adlam-owned block at Longburn. It’s tested for protein levels and Adlam said he likes the silage to be drier than normal to prevent the woodchip and sawdust bedding becoming soiled and sticky from dirtied by dung and urine.

Carroll calculated the annual daily feeding cost of an outdoor wintered stag at 96 cents, based on pasture and some balage topped up with palm kernel, whereas it cost \$1.08 a day to feed a barn wintered stag on grass silage and maize silage.

# Livestock contracts help cashflow lease

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

After venturing down the equity partnership pathway, Andy and Jackie Dennis are settled and happy in a lease arrangement at Cathedral Peaks, near Manapouri. The couple took on management of the 800ha sheep, beef, and deer farm in 2014 and finalised a five-year lease with owners Cam and Wendy McDonald in 2023.



**CONTRACTS FOR CASH:** Trading contracts for deer, sheep and cattle keep the cash flowing to pay the lease.

## Cathedral Peaks, Manapouri

- Sheep, beef, deer breeding and finishing farm owned by the McDonald family and leased by Andy and Jackie Dennis
- 800ha (750ha effective)
- Predominantly flat
- Rainfall: 1100mls

### Wintered stock 2024

#### Deer

750 hinds  
650 R1  
100 velvet stags  
20 sire stags

#### Sheep

3500 ewes  
850 hoggets (700 mated)  
1250 winter trade lambs

#### Cattle

90 R2 heifers  
110 R2 steers

### Wintered stock 2014

#### Deer

1000 hinds  
900 R1  
40 sire stags

#### Sheep

3400 ewes  
950 hoggets

The leasing move followed an equity partnership formed with Andy, his brother Jon, and their families for the family farm Coalbrook, near Waikaka. The Dennises brought to the lease partnership equity accrued from a stock management role at Mt Somers Station, as well as the lease of a 50-hectare block at Hororata owned by Andy’s grandfather, which they farmed when living in Canterbury from 2010 to 2014.

Under the partnership, Jon farmed Coalbrook while Andy managed the financial side and helped on farm during weekends and at busy times. After three years, the partnership had accrued enough equity for Jon to buy out Andy. The Dennises entered the equity partnership with a view to farm ownership, which they could have pursued, but they decided against it, Andy Dennis explains.

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**“Our goal is debt reduction so that if the lease ends, we can sell the stock and be in a good space financially to look at other investment opportunities.”**

“As a family group, we looked at many options, all that would have stretched us financially and emotionally.”

Instead, they took up the opportunity to lease Cathedral Peaks.

“We approached Cam and Wendy with the lease idea, knowing their family members wanted to invest elsewhere, rather than farm sheep, beef, and deer in Manapouri. “We hoped they would like to keep us involved in their farm in the future, and they did.”

The lease is for a five-year term, with a review due at the end of the third year including a price review.

On entering the lease, the Dennises could borrow enough to buy the sheep and 850 hinds, including replacements but not the 650 trade weaners. Extending their bank overdraft by \$200,000 to buy the weaners was not an option so PGG Wrightson (PGW) deer agent Ben Beadle entered them into a Go-Deer contract.

Under the contract, the McDonalds were paid for the weaners at commencement of the lease, and when the deer were slaughtered throughout the season, the Dennises made a trading margin less the purchase price of deer, less a Go-Deer fee based on the length of time grazed. This year, only half the number of weaners (313) are on a Go-Deer plan, and Dennis is hoping that next year no contract will be necessary.



“But we might do so if it’s another season of poor lamb returns and high costs,” he says.

PGW contracts are also used for cattle. This year, 200 R2 steers and heifers at around 360kgLW were secured in March, with a goal to slaughter them over November and December. With the way beef schedules are tracking, Dennis is anticipating a \$400 to \$500 margin per head, after contract fees.

The big advantage of the contracts is that there is no capital outlay and no interest payments over the duration.

“This means we can trade more animals throughout the season, which guarantees better cash flow to help pay the monthly cost of the lease.”

Negotiating the lease details took time, and there were a few sticky points, but good communication with the farm owners, the bank manager, and accountant kept things moving forward.

“Our accountant, Campbell Wood from Agrifocus, was with us from the start and kept us on track to make sure that every decision made was in line with debt reduction and achieving the financial goals we’d set ourselves.

“Our goal is debt reduction so that if the lease ends, we can sell the stock and be in a good space financially to look at other investment opportunities.”

In Dennis’s view, leasing and equity partnerships will be the way forward in agriculture for the next generation of farmers.

“It might be feasible to buy the stock, but there are very few who are in the position to buy the land plus the stock.

“Leases work if the owners of the farm are prepared to strike a realistic lease value so that the lessees are successful.”

Adding in other livestock classes has created new income streams throughout the year. The additions have been made with consideration to the farm’s environment and climate. It’s a juggling act at times, but Dennis looks beyond that to the bigger picture of debt reduction.

“If quality stock is managed and fed well, they perform well, which generates more cash to pay down debt.”

Success boils down to adding trading stock that complements, rather than compromises, the breeding stock.



**DEER COUNTRY:** Deer are an integral part of the Cathedral Peaks system.

## Advancing on

Andy Dennis is the chair of the Southland Advance Party. He took on the role five years ago and since then the group has broadened its scope by looking at ways to maximise the potential of deer in a mixed-livestock system. The group meets about five times a year on a member’s farm to view and then discuss specific issues or topics the farmer wants to address.

“Most of our group farm deer for venison and velvet, as well as sheep and cattle, so for each member we look at how deer can be managed to complement their particular system, taking into account the different stock classes, strengths and weaknesses, the climatic factors, and the prevailing market conditions.”

Each year, the group visits deer farms elsewhere and recently went to Peel Forest Estate, suppliers of the Dennises stags, and Forest Creek Station in South Canterbury.

“It’s a get-away, and also a great opportunity to see what deer farmers are doing elsewhere to balance environmental, financial and market challenges.”



**LOOK & LEARN:** Southland Advance Party members check out Peel Forest Estate’s indoor wintering shed.



“For example, in late summer we get dry. I could be chasing 20kg (carcass weight) lambs, but I don’t because I’m happy with 18kg lambs, knowing that my hinds are fed and lactating well and will get back in calf, and my ewes and hoggets are lining up to mate well.”

## "Leases work if the owners of the farm are prepared to strike a realistic lease value so that the leasees are successful."

Another example was the decision to add 100 velvet stags rather than more hinds because their feed demand aligned with Cathedral Peak’s grass growth.

“We get dry during February and March, which is a peak feeding time for lactating hinds, whereas velvet stags can be wound back feed-wise.” ■



**LESS STRESS:** Leasing means Andy and Jackie Dennis can enjoy farming without the stress of hefty debt.

## Match-fit leasing

People often comment to Andy that he was lucky the lease opportunity came along. Underpinning the lease arrangement, however, was a lot of hard work building equity and almost 10 years dedication to Cathedral Peaks. The need for compelling attributes, such as equity and practical experience, were echoed by BakerAg consultant Matt Carroll at a Next Generation 2024 classroom session on farming pathways. Aspiring lessees or equity partners need to make themselves attractive business partners, he said.

“It’s a bit like entering into a marriage – you have to consider what you’re bringing to the relationship.”

Any party entering a partnership needs to be “match-fit” but so does the farm. Assessing the suitability of a farm means drilling down on comparative regional and farm-specific production and financial data to get an understanding of a potential lease farm’s existing and future production costs, returns and overall financial performance.

Add in all the costs of running the business, including the manager’s salary, even if it is an owner-operator business, Carroll said. Appreciation, the cost of fertiliser, and repairs and maintenance are also important considerations. Be wary of financials with reduced or no fertiliser expenditure and factor them in at a realistic amount that will make a productive difference, he said.

A key measure is farm expenses/gross farm revenue, where 50 percent or lower was a good position.

“This year, we’re going to see farms up to 70 percent or more, which really starts to create challenges when you add on interest, depreciation and pay yourself.”

Once the level of farm performance is known, a fair rental for both the landowner (lessor) and tenant (lessee) can be calculated. Typically, a sustainable rental was 20–25 percent of gross farm revenue, but Carroll’s preference was for the lower end. A lease based on 20 percent of gross farm revenue could be backed by a maintenance agreement specifying exactly what was expected, he said.

“If you want top dollar, the lessee is going to cut corners so less comes out of their back pocket.

“There are some horror stories of people leasing a property and absolutely flogging it, walking away and leaving the owners with a farm that won’t sell.”

How to secure livestock is the other aspect to consider. There is no one-size-fits-all, and how to go about it is dependent on the equity brought into the arrangement and the off-farm earning potential of a partner.

Having the right legal documentation in place was discussed as a given, as was third party involvement through an independent farm consultant or adviser so there would be a mediator lined up if disagreements arose.

# A look ahead to fawning

Nathan Browerse

With spring comes a new crop of fawns. Fawning is a great time of the year so long as you have the essentials in place. You've done all the hard work earlier in the year to get the hinds pregnant; the next step is to get as many fawns as possible live on the ground and through to weaning. Here are a few reminders for the lead-up to fawning.

## Feed allocation for pregnant hinds

Adequate nutrition during late pregnancy is fundamental to the health of both the hinds and their fawns. The nutritional demands of a hind increase significantly in the final trimester of pregnancy. It is therefore critical to match the stocking rate to the feed available at set stocking. Ideally, aim for less than eight hinds per hectare. This provides adequate space and reduces competition for birthing sites. It also ensures the hinds are not feed-restricted in the lead-up to fawning and in early lactation.

- **Body Condition Scoring**

If you scanned the hinds, it's likely they were body condition scored (BCS), and a light mob drafted off. It's a good idea to check on that mob now to monitor how well they've picked up since scanning. Aim for a BCS of 3.0 to 3.5 (on a 5-point scale) at the time of fawning. If necessary, redraft the light mob, taking out those that haven't made 3.0, and preferentially feed them. If you didn't scan the hinds, now is the last practical time to draft off the lighter end for preferential feeding.

- **Feeding**

Ensure that hinds have the best quality pasture available. As the spring flush kicks on, this will provide the energy and protein required for milk production. For most farms, I wouldn't recommend supplementation at fawning, as it's best to leave them undisturbed. However, if you have had a year such as we've had in North Canterbury, however, you may be stuck between a rock and a hard place and forced to supplement. If you are scraping the barrel and have had to turn to a novel feed, discuss a safe feeding plan with your vet.

## Providing an ideal fawning environment

The environment in which hinds give birth plays a significant role in the survival of newborn fawns. You'll already know which are your best fawning paddocks. There is a balancing act in managing these paddocks, in terms of providing suitable cover for fawns but high enough pasture quality to support lactation.

A quiet and remote fawning paddock is best as this reduces stress for the fawning hind and reduces the likelihood of fawns wandering. In general terms, rough pasture for the fawns to hide amongst. Trees, scrub and shelter belts also provide shelter in adverse weather.

## Monitoring and intervention

As a rule, it's best to leave hinds and fawns undisturbed. Allowing fawning to proceed as naturally as possible will give you the best

results. Mismothering and misadventure are the two main causes of neonatal losses, and these are greatly influenced by human activity. If you need to intervene, ensure ahead of time that you have a clean and organised fawning pen, with all the equipment needed to correct any dystocias (calving difficulties) that occur.

## Preventing and managing disease

Disease prevention is critical to maintaining healthy fawns. You will likely know which diseases you need to be prepared for and have a management strategy in place. Vaccination against clostridial diseases and leptospirosis is recommended. Some farmers also vaccinate against other diseases, depending on the risk profile of their farm.

Cryptosporidium scours is a disease to be mindful of and control should be discussed with your vet.

Internal parasite control through grazing management should have been planned in the autumn. Fawns are susceptible to worms if your pasture is heavily contaminated, so providing clean pasture will reduce this risk.

Careful planning and attention to detail, focusing on optimal nutrition for your hinds, providing an ideal environment for fawns, and monitoring hinds closely will increase the survival rates of your fawns. The end result will be a more productive and profitable herd, contributing to the ongoing success of your deer farming operation. ■



Nathan Browerse is a North Canterbury vet.

# Venison Cornish pasties

Graham Brown, DINZ executive chef



## Ingredients

### Filling

1kg venison mince  
200g potato diced small (6mm x 6mm)  
100 g carrot, diced small  
100 g Southland swede, diced small  
100 g of onion, diced small  
50 g of semi-dried cranberries/craisins  
handful parsley, finely chopped

1 tbsp fresh thyme, finely chopped  
100 ml strong brown stock  
125 ml red wine  
1 tbsp Dijon mustard  
1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce  
Salt and pepper to taste

12  
PIECES

### Cases

8 sheets flaky or puff pastry, cut into 20 circles (12 cm in diameter)

1 egg and a splash of milk for egg wash

## Method

1. Pre-heat oven to 200° C.
2. Take one-third of the mince and pulse in a food processor with the brown stock and red wine until the consistency of sausage meat. Refrigerate.
3. Blanch the vegetables until just soft. Refresh in cold water and drain well.
4. Add the remaining mince to the meat mix, along with the remaining ingredients. Mix well and keep cold. Pan fry a bit of the mixture to check seasoning and adjust accordingly.
5. Egg wash the outside edge of the pastry circles. Place 80 grams of mixture into the middle of each pastry circle. Pull up the sides of the pastry like a purse and crimp well. To ensure a good seal, brush the outside of the parcel with the egg wash.
6. Place the 12 parcels on a baking sheet and bake for 20 minutes.

## To serve

Serve with a green tomato chutney or similar. ■



KITCHEN CAPERS: Chef Graham Brown preps the pasties mix in the kitchen at Fairfield House, the venue for the July DINZ and Nelson DFA meeting.





# SAVE THE DATE

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**50th anniversary of the Deer Industry Conference**  
**14 - 15 May 2025, Queenstown**

# SUCCESS ISN'T ACCIDENTAL

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