

# Deer Industry News

## ROARING TIMES

### **KING'S HONOUR**

Royal recognition for Brownie

### **VELVET**

Is our velvet export system fit-for-purpose?

### **VENISON SUCCESS**

Large-scale venison finishing at Apiti

A silhouette of a herd of deer standing on a grassy hill against a warm, golden sunset sky. The deer are positioned in the upper third of the image, with a line of trees visible in the background.

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# Deer Industry News

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NEW ZEALAND AND THE NEW ZEALAND  
DEER FARMERS' ASSOCIATION

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**Cover photo:** Leeza-Marie Pratt

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## Market visits and MOUs

By the time this goes to print, I will be in China as part of Prime Minister Luxon's mission, along with 27 other business leaders from New Zealand. The delegation – which looks to secure and grow trade and economic opportunities – has a strong focus on the primary industries, recognising China's position as our #1 trading partner.

I am there representing DINZ as we sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Dong'e Ejiao, a leading traditional Chinese medicine company, around exploring joint opportunities in the research, development and marketing of deer products, particularly in velvet. The signing of this MOU, positions us nicely for where we want to be – working with established partners, who have existing trusted brands and channels to consumers, in China's healthy foods space.

Back in the second half of May, pretty much immediately after conference, I was in both South Korea and China with DINZ Trade Strategy Manager Damon Paling as we looked to see how our Asian markets are doing, feeling, and what messages they might want us to relay back to New Zealand. More in-depth notes on both market visits can be found on our website, but I'll give the top-level messages here.

First, South Korea: The healthy foods market has matured, hence the plateauing in demand we have seen in recent years. Our future here lies in Health Functional Foods (HFFs), where there have been promising developments – with Kwangdong Pharmaceutical releasing its anti-fatigue and prostate function HFF product at the beginning of the year. This will be a long game, with HFF products requiring stringent human clinical trials. So long-term, it looks really promising, but patience will be needed in the short-term.

Secondly, China: In the velvet consumer market, China takes many of its cues from the Korean market, and they are seeing the maturation of the Korean healthy foods space also. This makes the aforementioned MOUs crucially important for our future in the Chinese market, but again, these are longer term plans. For the more immediate future, we need to listen to the consistent messaging coming from the Chinese commodity market, which is: cut velvet earlier to match the processing demands of the China market. While this message was clear coming from the China side, we were equally clear in our response – if you want smaller sticks, you need to incentivise that through clear pricing differentials.

My market visit to Asia coincided with the National Restaurant Association (NRA) trade show in the US. After talking to DINZ Market Activation Manager Virginia Connell, who did attend this year's NRA, some clear trends and differences between 2024 and 2025 have emerged. For one, the New Zealand as a provenance story holds broad appeal, and many people are more familiar with venison generally. Another difference was the tasting menu that DINZ chef Shannon Campbell cooked up for tradeshow attendees, which was more suited to showcasing New Zealand venison – think kombu marinated venison and venison steak sliders – as opposed to 2024, which had more of a focus on “further processed” offerings.

Keep an eye out for our report in DINZ eNews and on our website once the final numbers for Year One of the North American Retail Accelerator programme have been tallied, as we are expecting some pretty promising results.

And finally, I'd like to congratulate Graham “Brownie” Brown for being named an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit, recognised over King's Birthday weekend for his contributions to the New Zealand venison industry (see page 32). Well deserved! ■

Rhys Griffiths, Deer Industry NZ CEO

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## The Three-Bs test

If you meet more than three bastards on the same day, the odds are that you're the one being the bastard, Kevin Biggar said during the deer industry conference keynote presentation sponsored by FMG. He's the "Big Challenge" guy who, from couch potato beginnings, got motivated, followed a plan, and won the trans-Atlantic rowing race in 2003, and then in 2006, became the first Kiwi to trek unsupported to the South Pole. His fast-paced and "oar-sum" story was entertaining and the appropriate end-of-day tonic with tips on how to take on tough, demanding challenges in life and business. Read more about this year's conference on pages 10-16.



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## Compulsory reading



Harvey Pratt (4) has an eye for a great story. He can't get enough of *Deer Industry News*, and it's his preferred bedtime reading, according to mum, Leeza (see Golden winner). The magazine is often taken in Harvey's backpack for sharing with friends at kindy. Would complimentary copies of *Deer Industry News* in preschools throughout the country be a cunning way to sow the seeds of deer farming in Generation Alpha (those born between 2010 and now)?

## Leaning in on mental health

Lean on a Gate ([leanonagate.co.nz](http://leanonagate.co.nz)) recently launched Club Connect, a catalyst for building a local support network in rural communities. During June, July, and August, several Club Connect introductory events are being held throughout the country. These events could be the ideal way to hook into new clubs and shake the winter blues. Check out the calendar: [www.leanonagate.co.nz/club-connect#Tour-calendar](http://www.leanonagate.co.nz/club-connect#Tour-calendar)



## Deer farmer's edible wrap nets global interest



Media coverage has ramped up for Southland deer farmer and entrepreneur Grant Lightfoot since the story in December's *Deer Industry News* about his Kiwi E-conet bale wrap. Recently *Country Calendar* followed up the story about the Orepuki farmer's non-polluting, edible bale netting made from jute. Local farmers and contractors have knocked on his door, and he's fielded numerous calls and emails from further afield, including farmers in Texas. The net is manufactured in Kolkata, India, in 525m or 775m long lengths, which slot directly into a baler. It will cost slightly under \$4 to wrap a bale with E-conet, compared with about \$2.40 for conventional plastic wrapping. The first two shipping containers, filled with hundreds of rolls, arrived in NZ in early March.

## Fairlight Foundation



This year's three Fairlight Foundation interns met and mingled with the crowd at the deer industry conference field day at Fairlight Station. The interns, all Massey University graduates, said they had no hands-on experience with deer before coming to Fairlight. Mustering and working with deer in the shed had been "cool" and a "learning curve," intern Nerida Bateup said. The foundation's mission is to advance women in agriculture. The year-long programme for graduate women aged 21 or over includes plenty of practical experience with deer, sheep and cattle, and encourages the development of leadership and professional skills. The foundation is always on the lookout for industry and farmer support. Find out more: [thefairlightfoundation.org](http://thefairlightfoundation.org)

## Sweet spot for success



Photo: Alan Gibson

Winning the supreme Southland Environment Award has propelled Cam Nelson, Christina Vaughan and deer farming into the spotlight. Award judges said the couple had hit the sweet spot, balancing production and sustainability. The couple opened the farm gate of their intensively managed 164-hectare Lochiel farm to a crowd of around 100 people at a mid-May field day to celebrate the win. Nelson says it was great to see a range of farmers, and he hopes all left with some useful information. “It’s hard when you’re the centre of attention, but I felt the day went well, and everyone seemed to be engaged,” he said. Look out for a story about this award-winning farm in the next issue.

## More cheers to deer



While Pāmu continues to grow demand for its deer milk full cream powder (Dec 2024), NZ’s other deer milk processor, Deer Milking NZ, has explored other value-add opportunities, leading to the recent launch of DoeZ, a sleep support supplement. The tablets encapsulate (literally) the many benefits of deer milk, which is rich in bioactive peptides, amino acids, and essential nutrients that can help promote sleep sooner and for longer. Deer Milking NZ’s Rebecca Davidson says the latest development is proof that deer milk is something special. “Our research team suggested it might even have benefits for calming, fighting anxiety, and sleep. We gave it a go and launched DoeZ—and we’ve been blown away by the overwhelming response from customers saying it’s changed their lives,” she says. “We’re so proud to bring something truly world-first, straight from the heart of New Zealand’s primary industries.” Find out more: [doez.nz](https://doez.nz)

## Golden winner

Newbie photographer Leeza-Marie Pratt snapped this year’s winning shot in the MSD/Allflex deer industry photo competition, which features on the front cover of this issue. Husband Andrew, the 2IC at Wellington Farms at Wharepapa South, gave Pratt a Canon EOS 1500D for her birthday in April. She’s been snapping away ever since, taking photos of children,



Harper (8) and Harvey (4), as well as plenty of deer. After making the decision to enter the deer competition, it took about two weeks of snapping out on the farm to get the right shot. As it turned out, the picture-perfect subject - Stag 6656 - was snapped just outside the family’s home. “He was coming up to the fence line alongside the house every morning and evening and putting on a bit of a roaring show. The kids noticed him one evening, so I got the camera and went out. He’s a bit feisty, but I was brave and took a few quickly.”

## Laura the Great

Everyone loves a winner, especially grassroots, good sorts such as Laura Billings, this year’s Matuschka Award recipient. Nominators of the Hawke’s Bay DFA branch dynamo said she had outstanding organisational and coordinating skills. “Laura’s ability to coordinate an event and cross the T’s and dot the I’s is second-to-none,” a supporting testimonial said. Billings raised her hand to help with numerous deer and community projects with a “quiet, efficient demeanour and always with a smile on her face,” another said. Read more about winners and this year’s deer industry conference on pages 10-16.



## Crowd favourite



“Monarchs of the Glen,” a 25-minute video of faces and comments from DFA leaders and contributors of the past was well received by this year’s deer industry conference crowd. The insights and comments from interviewees were an engaging way to chart and capture industry issues and changes over the last 50 years. See for yourself: <https://vimeo.com/1093590091/7a9e86ae0b> ■



# How Rachel hooked Rusty...

As a 14-year-old, Rusty Andrews had his sights set on becoming a professional golfer. His Ryan Fox-aspirations fell by the wayside, however, when a couple of local farmers and a particular hind hooked him on the joys and challenges of working with deer. Nowadays, he's Silver Fern Farms' – the Platinum sponsor of this year's deer industry conference – Upper South Island Deer Manager.



## Are you a true-blue Cantabrian?

Yes! I was Lincoln Hospital's first New Year's Day baby (01/01/1980) and grew up in Templeton, on the outskirts of Christchurch, surrounded by red clover paddocks, racehorses and small deer farms. These days, I live on the northern side of the Waimakariri River in Ohoka, with my wife, Bridgette, and my two daughters, Scarlett (10) and Lulu (5). We also have two horses, two ponies, six chickens, two cats, and a golden Labrador.

## How did your involvement with deer begin?

I was introduced to two local deer farmers, Harley Rankin and Jim Kyle, who got me to help them with TB testing and other farm work. One of Harley's hinds called Rachel, a pure Eastern, gave me a bit of rough and tumble, and I was hooked. I also spent a lot of time helping local vet legend Jim McPhee TB test all around the Christchurch region.

## How did your deer-related career evolve?

Once the farming bug took hold, I approached former PGGWrightson General Manager Brian Butcher for advice on how to go about entering the stock and station industry. His advice was to get some practical experience. I was very fortunate to gain work experience with the Stokes family at Sinai, as well as the Hood family (Mt Hutt Station), who placed me on their lease block at Windwhistle. For me, a teenager at the time, it was like Christmas looking after 2500 hinds and progeny, along with 650 velvet stags.

From there, I went next door to The Point, where Steve and Tina Richards sharefarmed deer with local stock agent Kelvin Sewell. This reignited my interest in becoming a stock and station agent and led to a position with PGGWrightson based in Darfield, covering sheep, beef and deer. I got a lot of tutorials from Ron Schroeder during that time. After a few years, Malcolm Gourlie, another 6'6" icon, approached me to talk about the direction Silver Fern Farms were taking with deer. He offered me a position as the deer specialist, and it's a role I'm still enjoying 14 years later.

## How has your role changed since starting out?

It's become a lot more tech-based; however, I'm a firm believer that certain things must remain face-to-face, especially the planning of supply and live sales contracts and such.

## Beyond work, you have family deer connections?

Bridgette is the stepdaughter of Graham Carr (Peel Forest Estate), and it was through him that we met. It's always great to meet up with Graham because he's always keen to hear about what's happening on-farm and in the markets, which makes for great conversation around the dinner table.

## What are your interests outside of work hours?

Horses and our local school. Bridgette and I go hunting together (the Tally-Ho version), while both girls ride with the Kaiapoi Pony Club. I'm also the co-chair of the Ohoka School PTA, where there is always something that needs doing or organising.

## What were the highlights and take-home messages from the recent conference?

It was a proud family moment, seeing Graham receive the Deer Industry Award and also my sister-in-law, Rebecca Davidson, receive the Gallagher Technology and Innovation Award for her hard work with Deer Milking NZ.

The biggest take-home conference message for me was the need to work together to grow the industry. I think that this will come through continued investment in market diversification and brand promotion to deliver long-term stable pricing. This will give farmers the confidence to invest. We have a fantastic product that is in the box seat as we enter a shortage of protein in the near future. ■



# Duncan NZ: Certainty and scope

For the second consecutive year, Duncan NZ are offering a 12-month Guaranteed Minimum Price (GMP) contract.

The format was implemented in response to suppliers needing more mid-term price certainty to help them budget and make informed decisions around stock purchases/sales, financials and feed planning.

Some features of the Duncan NZ GMP contract include:

- An extension of the traditional (Cervena/U4) 45-85kg weight bracket. The revised upper weight limit is now **120kg CW**, offering suppliers the opportunity to capture significant value, even outside the chilled season. This also allows velvet farmers to achieve improved farm gate returns from young cull deer.

- A significant increase in spring peak pricing, reflecting the increasing demand for the key European chilled season.
- Additional value in the April-October period, reflecting the growing shift to year-round venison consumption, as well as the need to efficiently utilise plant capacity while farmed numbers stabilize.

Duncan NZ have also increased pricing for smaller deer, which often remain on farm at this time of year, with a rise of \$0.80/kg advertised for the lighter 40-45kg weight range. ■

**If you are interested in exploring supply opportunities with Duncan NZ please contact:**

**North Island:** Vanessa Crowley / 02102292672 / [vanessa@duncan-nz.com](mailto:vanessa@duncan-nz.com)

**South Island:** Ray Coombes / 0213752544 / [ray@duncan-nz.com](mailto:ray@duncan-nz.com)

*Editorial supplied.*



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## Oh deer...

The latest Statistics NZ figures reveal that deer had the highest percentage fall of all livestock categories over the last 10 years, falling 26 percent to 709,000 deer as of June 2024.

Sheep and dairy cattle numbers have also dwindled over the same period, with the total number of sheep falling by 6.2 million (21 percent) to 23.6 million and dairy cattle by 861,000 (13 percent) to 5.8 million.

Bucking the down-sizing livestock trend is beef cattle, with the population of 3.7 million beef cattle in 2024 similar to the total in 2014. The total area in grassland (excluding tussock) across NZ was 7.1 million hectares as of June 2024, falling by 809,000 ha (10 percent) over the last 10 years.

### ...but numbers are stabilising

In the DINZ 2023–24 Annual Report, Board Chair Paddy Boyd says in his opening remarks that the venison market is showing strong signs of recovery, with hind numbers starting to stabilise and new deer farms being established across the country.

“Our industry has proven time and again its ability to adapt, innovate and grow. With the dedication of our farmers, processors, marketers and industry leaders, I have no doubt that the sector will continue to strengthen and prosper.”

DINZ CEO Rhys Griffiths follows on, acknowledging the disruptive 2023–2024 year, dominated by market access concerns in China, but noting the continued stable venison pricing.

Deer product export earnings for 2023–24 held steady at \$332 million, compared with \$340 million the previous year. The slight decline in export receipts was due to the reduced supply and production of venison.

The Summary Consolidated Financial Statements (year ended 30 September 2024) reports an operating loss of \$281,000, a

turnaround from the \$280 operating surplus of 2023.

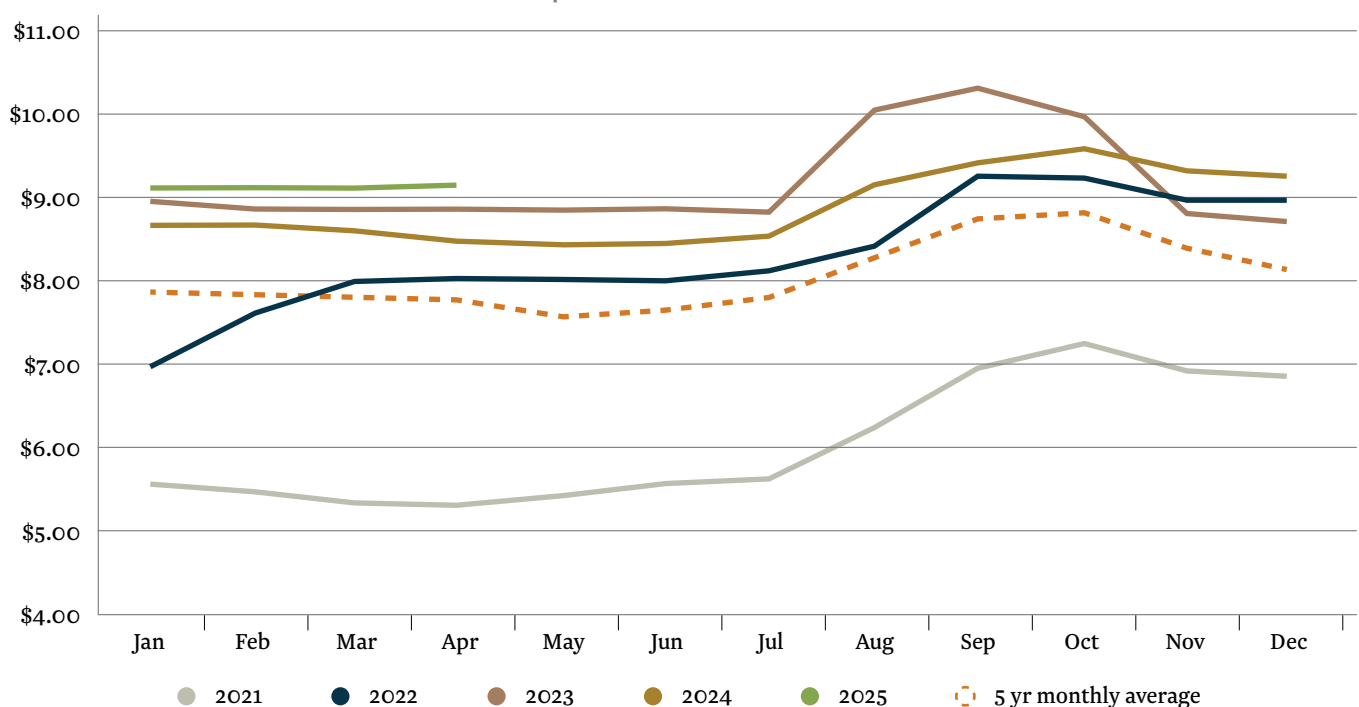
The loss reflects a \$585,000 drop in income from \$9.33 million in 2023 to \$8.74 million in 2024. The decrease is due mostly to the \$460,000 reduction in venison levy income. The \$460,000 equates to an estimated 2,230 ton drop in venison production based on the red deer venison levy of 20.5c/kg. Over the same period velvet levy income increased \$188,000 representing an estimated extra 65 tons of velvet based on a \$2.90/kg levy.

Some of the 2023–24 achievements and milestones noted in the report include:

- The first Ministry of Food and Drug Safety-approved Health Functional Food (HFF) claim on a novel extract/s containing – and promoting – NZ velvet in Korea
- The signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with prominent Chinese pharmaceutical company, Beijing Tong Ren Tang
- The start of North American Retail Accelerator Programme
- Continuing work on climate change strategy
- Establishment of a Research Committee to provide strategic guidance for the industry research programme
- \$700,000 of MPI funding for practical Integrated Farm Planning support
- NZDFA events such as the Next Generation conference in Palmerston North and Hawke's Bay branch's 'Deer to Succeed' day. ■

View the annual report on the Deer NZ website: [deernz.org/home/deer-industry-new-zealand/publications-and-media](https://deernz.org/home/deer-industry-new-zealand/publications-and-media)

National published schedule 2021 - 2025





## India FTA an opportunity for NZ venison and velvet?

Beef is probably off the agenda for India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) discussions, given the sacred status of cows in the predominantly Hindu-practicing population.



**CONFIRMED:** Trade Minister Todd McClay and Indian counterpart Piyush Goyal confirm the re-launch of FTA discussions.

But what about venison? Is it a red meat option that could find favour in India, home to 1.4 billion inhabitants? In a submission supporting the NZ-India FTA negotiations, DINZ CEO Rhys Griffiths said that securing access for venison presents “a unique opportunity for mutual benefit, enabling New Zealand to expand its protein export offering while supporting India’s demand for high-quality and culturally acceptable meat products. Further, Griffiths says there could be a good market for velvet antler, if it follows the same pathway as other Asian countries as a well-being ingredient for immunity and fatigue.

The submission said there were relevant demographic factors which could create opportunities for NZ to build a significant market including: changing Indian consumer and dietary preferences; significant wealth increases and the rise of the educated middle-class who are open to new food offerings; and young and urban-living Indians looking for time-efficient and trendy foods that are protein-focused.

FTA negotiations with India started in early May. ■

## New bill could benefit deer milk processors

The Dairy Industry Restructuring (Export Licences Allocation) Amendment Bill (DIRA), which came into force on 1 May, includes quota for deer milk processors.

In announcing the passing of the Bill in Parliament in late March, Agriculture Minister Todd McClay said the inclusion of deer, along with sheep and goat processors, would help them by unlocking new export opportunities and revenue streams.

“New Zealand’s dairy farmers and processors produce world-class products, but outdated rules have restricted export growth. This law unlocks greater access to lucrative overseas markets and ensures the quota system reflects the diversity of our dairy industry,” McClay says.



Hamish Glendinning

Pāmu deer milk business lead Hamish Glendinning says it’s pleasing to see changes that will better support businesses of all sizes, including those who are involved in establishing new industries, such as sheep and deer milk.

“Whilst we are currently focused on markets outside of those with quotas administered under DIRA, we support these efforts to unlock new export opportunities and revenue streams,” Glendinning says.

In the meantime, a key focus for Pāmu is to work with MPI and their counterparts in target export markets to ensure market access is secured.

Pāmu’s deer milking season went well, though a wet spring in the south and a drought in the north threw up new and unique challenges, Glendinning says. ■

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## Looking back, looking forward

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* Editor

This year's annual deer industry conference perfectly captured the essence of the Māori proverb "Ka mua, ka muri", which means looking back in order to move forward. It was a milestone event, and organisers reflected this with a thoughtfully curated line-up of presentations paying homage to the past, and present while offering a glimpse of future opportunities.

### The past

The first presentation was a cleverly crafted tribute from long-time and respected industry contributors Trevor Walton and Tony Pearse.

"You honour those that went before and hopefully learn some lessons from them," Walton, editor of *The Deer Farmer* magazine from 1979 until 2012 and more recently an industry communications consultant.

**"There was a huge sense of optimism, and there was a sense that we had all drunk the magic waters of the spring. Sometimes we drank a little too much water from that spring."**

Trevor Walton

His entertaining chronological walk-through of the industry's history was punctuated with well-chosen photos and graphics. He covered the rise of deer farming to a 5000-strong farmer industry amid the prevailing political landscape, including the Muldoon-controlled economic era and setbacks such as the tax reforms of the mid-1980s. The New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association (NZDFA) was established and led by strong and

visionary individuals, he said. They cemented a strong governance and operational base for an industry that attracted "a diverse mix of industry people, including gutsy, back-block, bush shirt-wearing farmers; blue bloods from Christ's College; big city investors; innovative stock agents; and adventurous veterinarians."

Despite the legal loopholes faced by pioneers, unanticipated deer health problems, in-house squabbling over the velvetting of deer, and a venison price crash following the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown, the industry was upbeat, and the conferences of those formative years reflected that vibe.

"They were invariably wild affairs," Walton said. "There was a huge sense of optimism, and there was a sense that we had all



**HONOURING THE PAST:** Trevor Walton's presentation was an entertaining and informative blast of the past.

drunk the magic waters of the spring. Sometimes we drank a little too much water from that spring.”

The next chapter of developments, most notably the amalgamation of the Game Industry Board and NZDFA under the Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) banner, was detailed by former DINZ Producer Manager Tony Pearce.

The structural and associated governance changes brought resistance from some, but most saw it as a “sound strategic move,” Pearce said. A key change was the creation of the producer manager role, which he filled, to encourage and assist NZDFA activity at both branch and national level.

“It opened for me the next 20 years of the most wonderful working environment and contact with this industry.”

The changed structure didn’t stop the unexpected from happening. He mentioned one such disruptor as John’s disease. The insidious wasting disease incurred huge costs across the industry through lost production, but the industry rose to the challenge, implementing a system and structure to monitor and manage the disease. The DFA, meat processors, scientists, and vets all worked together to contain the problem and establish John’s Management Limited. This was a stellar example of industry collaboration, Pearce said.

He concluded by emphasising the important role the NZDFA played in advocating on behalf of members. The branch structure, regular communication such as Stagline, and initiatives such as the Next Generation programme ensured the thoughts and aspirations of grassroots farmers were heard and actioned.

“The DFA relies on this relatively small subscription to function effectively, while continuing to deliver a strong, independent view that represents the producer at all levels of industry.”



*DREAM JOB: Former DINZ Producer Manager Tony Pearce said the role gave him 20 years of full-on and rewarding contact with the deer industry.*



*NOW THEN: The high esteem in which Graham Carr, this year’s recipient of the Deer Industry Award, is held was evident from the numerous supporting testimonials submitted by farmers, scientists, and supporters from the NZDFA and DINZ. “Simply put his involvement in the industry at every level, including time on the DINZ Board and wholly supportive activity involving his local DFA branch, demonstrates his commitment, enjoyment and outreach to the wider New Zealand deer industry...he is an outstanding and worthy recipient of the Deer Industry Award in this milestone year,” the covering nomination form said.*



*A MONARCH OF THE GLEN: John Burrowes, NZDFA President from 1983–1986, and Jan Burrowes.*

## \$300k industry good fund

The Ian Spiers Memorial Trust got a special mention from Tony Pearce. Spiers was an NZDFA chair who died in office in late 1988. Following his death, the Spiers family, with the backing of the Game Industry Board and DFA branches, established the legacy trust. Individuals or groups could apply for the funding of practical or applied on-farm projects that had industry-wide benefits, or to help fund the establishment of new branches or ‘next generation’-focused groups. The current endowment of \$313,000, had been boosted by funds dispersed by branches and special interest groups, such as the New Zealand Fallow Society, which had disbanded.

“The trust defines the passion that Ian Spiers had for the DFA and deer farming,” Pearce said.



*MOVERS & SHAKERS: Both Alastair Porter (left) and Tom Williams (right), with wife Gay, played prominent roles in the early years of the industry. Williams was GIB Chair from 1984–1994.*



## The present

The first 25 years of deer farming may have been defined by rapid growth and development, but not so the last 20 years, Rhys Griffiths said in his address. The industry was in decline: farmed deer numbers had dipped from a high of 1.7 million to 700,000; the total volume and value of exports had shrunk; and the number of farms with deer had fallen to around 1000.

**“Winston Churchill once said to improve is to change, and to be perfect is to change often. We should be pretty damn perfect given the changes we've gone through over the last 12 to 18 months.”**

Rhys Griffiths

“We’re an industry in decline and relative returns have fallen, so I’m all for change, but change doesn’t happen in isolation...we have to be working as one industry,” he said.

He zoned in on the number one challenge over the last 12 months: renegotiating China market access for frozen velvet. It had been a difficult process but was ultimately resolved, representing a massive achievement – though the prevailing uncertainty throughout the process had been used to advantage some players along the velvet chain, to the detriment of the wider industry. Uncertainty, misinformation

and oversupply had manifested to a 20 percent drop in price.

Turning attention to the positive, Griffiths said the North American Retail Accelerator programme, launched in July 2024, had made a promising start, exceeding both annual volume and value targets in nine months.

Beyond the markets, he mentioned developments in environmental stewardship and successful engagement with relevant government policy makers. Following the unravelling of He Waka Eke Noa – the failed primary production sector attempt at developing a framework for measuring, managing and reducing agricultural GHG emissions – DINZ was now part of the Pastoral Sector Group – a “small but vocal group” of primary sector representatives that had a seat around the table with Agricultural Minister Todd McClay.

“We might have to accept that there will be some requirements to do our bit, but we’re in a better position having a seat at that table. The government is keen to work with us.” he said. ■



**CALL TO ACTION:** “I’m all for change, but change doesn’t happen in isolation...we have to be working as one industry,” Rhys Griffiths said.



**GALLAGHER GUYS:** Ben Dunbar and Mark Maitland were on call to explain Gallagher’s wide range of animal management solutions. Gallagher were sponsors of this year’s silent auction at conference.



**DEER SUPPORTERS:** NZAgritrade, morning and afternoon tea sponsors of this year’s conference, were represented by tech experts Annika Ferris and Richard Cruickshank.



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# NARA off to a good start

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The promising start of the North American Retail Accelerator (NARA) programme was the good news story on the marketing front. Third quarter results, presented by DINZ Market Activation Manager Virginia Connell, showed both annual volume and value targets on track to be exceeded for the first year.

Performance metric	NARA Year One					NARA annual target
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	YTD	
New distributor appointed	2	0	1		3	N/A
New retailer secured	2	2	3		7	N/A
New product (SKU) launched	3	1	2		6	N/A
High value LEG CUTS export volume (000 kg)	87	102	106		295	300
OTHER total export volume (000 kg)	310	262	369		942	1,300
Total export value - FOB NZD (retail channel)	\$4,934,988	\$5,071,382	\$7,484,838		\$17,491,208	\$10,400,000

The goal of the \$5 million project over three years, which started in July 2024, is to increase the volume and value of venison, especially leg cuts.

She assured the conference crowd that President Trump's tariffs had not stymied sales.

"It's not really affecting us. The NARA programme is going really well, and the [venison] companies are pushing forward."

Emphasis to date has been on developing "fit for market" products. Examples given included the upsizing of ground venison (mince) pack sizes from 250 grams to 500 grams and including more rib bone in Tomahawk steaks because that's what American consumers were familiar with.

"There's been a lot of development in product and packaging, and also in educational tools," she said. Videos were being used to educate consumers about New Zealand venison and the backstory of the New Zealand farmed deer industry.

## Q+A

While the achievements of NARA were positive, farmers in the audience had earlier voiced concerns about NARA and DINZ's venison strategy.

"I'm told we're going to kill 200,000 this year," Graham Carr, from Peel Forest Estate, said.

"That puts pressure on processing plants and marketers. NARA is a good initiative, but we don't want to short-supply this market. Somehow, we have to sell deer farming to get some scale back. Staying where we are isn't going to cut the mustard."



**A GOOD START:** "The NARA programme is going really well, and the [venison] companies are pushing forward," Virginia Connell says.

He asked if the DINZ board had a focus or strategy for growing the national deer herd. Board Chair Paddy Boyd had no definitive answer, but said growth in the industry was a team effort the entire industry, including producers, DFA branches, and the next generation of producers.

"In my mind, it's about the next generation and giving them something to aspire to," he said.

In the earlier Q+A session, Frank Taylor, a deer farmer for 40 years, was clearly frustrated that the industry had "gone backwards." The facts and the numbers are what they are, Griffiths said, and the last couple of years had been particularly difficult. However, he believed there was a modest rebuild in deer numbers, and although venison prices weren't high, they were stable.

"I do think we're starting to turn the corner, but I'm not disagreeing with what you're saying."

South Canterbury farmer

Dave Morgan commended the board on their push-through in reinstating velvet access to China but was critical of below-par venison prices. This had eroded farmer confidence and their investment in production-enhancing genetics and pastures.

"The only way to stop the industry shrinking is to get paid more for venison and compete with land-use change."

DINZ board member and Silver Fern Farm's Dave Courtney said venison marketers are focused on three things to drive farmer returns: diversification and growth of markets to increase



**DISAPPOINTED:** "We're going backwards. It's not good enough," deer farmer Frank Taylor said.

competition for New Zealand venison; adding value to and selling more of the carcass; and building the brand.

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**“NARA is a good initiative, but we don’t want to short-supply this market. Somehow, we have to sell deer farming to get some scale back,”**

Graham Carr

“That’s the strategy in a nutshell, but these things take time.”

Alliance Group’s Nigel Jones said as well as maximising carcass yield, maximising channel penetration is equally important. It isn’t just about retail vs online vs commodity outlets; it is important to be represented in all the channels in each of the markets to optimise returns.

Taihape deer farmer Andrew Peters asked why after 50 years, venison marketers were still talking about selling the whole carcass. Dave Courtney said it was about increasing the value paid for every part of the carcass, which took investment and time. He gave an example that was the five years taken to get New Zealand venison into Albertsons, one of the largest food retailers in the United States. ■



*The afternoon workshop sessions provided valuable updates to major projects.*

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## Charting a way forward for velvet

Cameron Frecklington, *Deer Industry News* writer

At conference, in one of the afternoon workshops, discussion was had around the potential for introducing velvet export licensing, modelled on the Horticultural Export Authority and designed to add transparency, consistency, control, and collective strength.

The workshop followed on from DINZ CEO’s Rhys Griffiths morning address, where Griffiths said that the free market model of velvet selling was no longer fit for purpose in an industry that had grown from 450 tons to 1,150 tons in just over 10 years.

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**“What can we do to shape the future of the industry on our terms, rather than being beholden to the terms of others?”**

Rhys Griffiths

Although the system offered flexibility and competition, the downside was that farmers often ended up as price takers and offshore buyers could exert significant influence. Also, preferred industry-wide velvet grading, branding and marketing could be breached.

“What can we do to reward the right type of behaviour by the ‘good guys’, and what can we do to shape the future of the industry on our own terms, rather than being beholden to the terms of others?” Griffiths asked the audience.

Since conference, the Export Licensing Working Group (ELWG) has been formed, representing a cross-section of farmers, processors, and exporters, each selected for their industry insight, diversity of perspective, and capacity to contribute constructively to the evaluation.

“Export licensing is not a new concept. Other primary sectors have adopted this model to strengthen standards and improve long-term returns,” says DINZ Trade Strategy Manager Damon Paling, who led the discussion around export licensing at conference.

“However, any application under the Horticultural Export Authority Act must be supported by an export marketing strategy. Basically, a coordinated, sector-wide plan that demonstrates how the industry will work together to improve performance and unlock greater value.

“To support this evaluation, DINZ met in early June directly with the Horticulture Export Authority and engaged external legal counsel to collectively better understand the process, performance benchmarks, and governance requirements under the Act.”

The Export Licensing Working Group then met 19 June in Christchurch to examine other potential ways for the deer



**BIG QUESTION:** Damon Paling asked if it was possible to build a better velvet export system.



industry to take back some element of control, instead of being dictated to by external forces.

The group's role is to further scope a licensing system while taking a more in-depth look at the pros and cons, intended and unintended consequences, and the setting of standards in alignment with existing protocols and compliance. Consultation with stakeholders – farmers, the Ministry for Primary Industries and the Minister of Agriculture – for implicit support would be crucial, Paling said.

Go-ahead for an export licensing model under the HEA Act would require a vote. Paling envisaged that the earliest a new system would be in place was the 2026/27 season.

The group is also considering whether updates to the VelTrak Terms of Use for the 2025/26 season could strengthen integrity at the domestic end of the supply chain. While these changes are still under evaluation, they could help ensure that only compliant operators — those meeting filing and levy obligations — retain access to the system.

“The updates under consideration would not only address current issues within the domestic supply chain but also lay the groundwork for a credible export licensing application,” says Paling, “by demonstrating that the industry has the systems and discipline required for a regulated framework.

“In this way, the proposed updates to VelTrak could contribute meaningfully to a wider export marketing strategy and support any future application under the HEAA.”

While no final decisions have been made, Paling adds that one option under consideration is to limit VelTrak access to entities that

meet baseline compliance requirements — including timely return filing and levy payment. The aim is to discourage behaviours that undermine trust, distort competition, or erode value.

“Under this approach, non-compliant registered users could be suspended from VelTrak, with access only reinstated once the relevant compliance issues have been resolved. If progressed, the updated Terms of Use would come into effect for the 2025/26 velvet season.”

According to Paling, most velvet producers won't see any immediate change — particularly those already working with buyers, processors or exporters who meet their compliance obligations. But the direction of travel is clear: strengthening the system to support compliant operators and create long-term value.

“These discussions are about preparing the velvet sector for long-term success. Export licensing under the HEAA requires robust systems and an agreed marketing strategy. The proposed updates to VelTrak represent a practical first step toward demonstrating that the industry is committed to transparency, traceability, and meeting the evolving expectations of customers — especially in key markets such as China and Korea.”

The ELWG will continue to evaluate these options over the coming weeks. Further communication will happen through industry channels and DFA engagement. A recommendation will be presented to the DINZ Board in mid-July.

Feedback is welcomed from across the industry as this evaluation continues. ■

## Seeing is believing

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Move with the times and get with it – those were the big messages from the youngest presenters at conference, Millie Morgan and Brad Olsen.

The pair gave a relaxed yet informative presentation from a next generation perspective of influences, opportunities and challenges within China and South Korea following recent self-funded visits.

“China's our biggest trading partner, and Korea is our fifth largest, so we wanted to get there. Seeing is believing,” Olsen said.

Olsen is a “Wellington big cheese” high-profile economics commentator, while Morgan is an agribusiness and forestry senior solicitor with experience in deer farming and who studied at two universities in China. They became friends after their 2019 selection for the Asian New Zealand Foundation's 25 to Watch, a programme to develop and support the next generation of leaders.

They spoke of the differences between the markets, as well as the changing in-market trends driven by generational change – namely a shift away from the traditional concept of traditional medicine and into the convenience space.

Morgan explained that China's next generation understand traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and the role it plays in helping

them look and feel good, but they haven't got the time nor inclination to consume the “fuddy-duddy” medicines and tonics favoured by their parents. Instead, they want convenient, ready-to-go healthy food products for eating on the run. They also want to know that what they eat has the approval of social media influencers, or KOL (Key Opinion Leaders), who are recruited by specialist agencies to promote certain brands and generate millions of followers.

“That's how you get traction in that market. It gets the consumers in, and they get to understand



**SAME BUT DIFFERENT:**  
*Although there are market similarities between China and South Korea, there is no one-size-fits-all marketing strategy, Brad Olsen said.*

what goes into the product, and then they're more willing to buy it," Morgan said.

An emerging market within China was affluent older people wanting to look good and stay fit through more accessible nutraceuticals – foods with nutritional and health-giving benefits – rather than traditional medicines. This trend was also apparent in South Korea, Olsen said.

"They're increasingly looking for convenience and healthy food products that are hip, cool and with a nutraceutical focus."

In South Korea, there is opportunity for more health food products, but Morgan said another important channel for New Zealand velvet was through traditional Korean medicine (TKM) doctors. Hanpure, a major buyer of New Zealand velvet, supplies around half of South Korea's estimated 15,000 TKM practitioners. Each practitioner consults with and prepares treatments for up to 100 patients a day.

Both said that in South Korea, the trust model is crucial in ensuring the success of a product. The TKM process was based on trust; the patient had complete trust in the practitioner and what they prescribed, and the practitioner had to have complete trust in the New Zealand velvet used. Olsen added that in South Korea,



**GET WITH IT:** Young people in China and South Korea want their TCM in ready-to-go products, preferably endorsed by a social media influencer, Millie Morgan said.

everything had a "K-tag," which underpinned trust and credibility.

"There's K-medicine, there's K-food, there's K-pop, and everything in between... if a product is integrated with a trusted Korean brand, you'll get it into market and into people's hands a lot quicker."

**"They're increasingly looking for convenience and healthy food products that are hip, cool and with a nutraceutical focus."**

Brad Olsen

One-child families are a growing demographic, which has given rise to the "six pocket" parents and grandparents who lavish the single child (or pet, in child-free households) with the best of everything, usually at a premium price.

In summary, Olsen said his big message was that for China and South Korea, there is no one-size-fits-all marketing strategy. Although there were similar market drivers for New Zealand velvet in both markets, each country had unique groups of consumers, all looking for products that met specific needs, aspirations and expectations.

"The opportunities are there, but we must grab them. If you haven't been there, go and see for yourself, because you will learn so much." ■

This conference session was sponsored by Alliance.



## Committed to deer

Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News Editor

Pāmu, a conference Premium Sponsor, is committed to the deer industry, Lower South Island General Manager Grant McNaughton, said.

"...we're committed. We're here, and we're staying."

When he took on the general manager role 18 months ago, there were rumours that the state-owned enterprise was stepping back from deer, however, that was not the case. Although Pāmu had exited from deer farming on the West Coast, which McNaughton understood was for environmental reasons, the number of hinds on southern South Island farms will increase. As an example, he mentioned a southern finishing farm where after a three-year stand-down, deer had been reintroduced with the addition of 500 weaners.



**LOUD & CLEAR:** "If there is one take home message, it's that we are committed to deer," Grant McNaughton said.

Pāmu will drive growth of the deer business internally, he explained, using their own breeding herds to increase the number of hinds. In another in-house move, Pāmu was now finishing weaners rather than selling them.

This year on the southern farms, a forecast 12,000 deer will be finished, while over the next three years, the number of hinds will increase from around 17,000 to 21,000. The southern South Island farms are forecast to generate \$12 million of income, McNaughton said.

Pāmu farms 1.3 million sheep, deer and cattle on 112 farms covering 360,000ha. A total of 43,000 deer are run – about 75% in Southland on nine farms, with the remainder across three farms in the North Island. Rangitāiki Station, in the central North Island, was switching to a velvet focus, which better fitted feed supply and demand. ■

Pāmu sponsored the conference lunch and deer milk shots.



## 2025 MSD/Allflex Deer Industry Photo Competition winners



**FIRST PLACE:** Leeza-Marie Pratt - *Sunset roar*



**SECOND PLACE:** Angela McIntyre - *Magnificent 7*



**THIRD PLACE:** Hunter Jennings - *Laying in paddock together*



**PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARD:** Emma Smith - *Hinds in a shape of love heart made from grain together*



**ELK/WAPITI AWARD:** Tony Pidgeon - *Proud*







NZDFA Executive Committee: Chair Mark McCoard, Karen Middelberg, Evan Potter, Tom Macfarlane

## Die-hards

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* Editor

This year's milestone conference, celebrating 50 years of the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association (NZDFA), was a fitting time to acknowledge members who have gone beyond the call of duty in advancing the aims and objective of the association.

At the Friday evening dinner at Walter Peak, the NZDFA Executive Committee made special presentations to past NZDFA chairs Justin Stevens, John Somerville and David Morgan. Grant Charteris and Jamie Ward were also acknowledged for their contributions to the executive committee, and Tony Pearse for his wide-ranging

advocacy and support of NZDFA activities during his 20-plus years as DINZ Producer Manager.

At the conference awards dinner, NZDFA life memberships were awarded to Hub Hall, Waikato; Ian Bristow, Kaipara; Edmund Noonan, Canterbury-West Coast; and Bill Taylor, Southland.

### Hub Hall



**MEASURED SUCCESS:** In Hub Hall's entertaining acceptance speech, he said it took him several years to get the legal go-ahead to farm deer and keep a single red deer stag. He was eventually granted permission on the condition that he de-sexed the stag. That meant he wouldn't be able to grow antler and would defeat the whole purpose of farming deer, Hall said. Luckily, the nonsensical legal requirements didn't deter Hall from farming deer, and more than 60 years later, he still has a "hankering" for deer. Hall, a 2009 Deer Industry Award winner, was bestowed NZDFA life membership for his many years dedicated to deer. He became a certified SCI measurer in 1991, since which he has measured more than 2000 velvet and trophy heads at competitions throughout the country. He was also chair of the Waipa DFA branch for many years.

### Ian Bristow



**GO-TO GUY:** Ian Bristow was a foundational member of the Kaipara DFA branch and a committee member for many years before stepping into the role of chair in 2006. Branch member Dave Chisholm said Bristow's wider industry involvement in NZDFA branch chair meetings, conferences, the Rising Stars competition, and Fallow Deer Society meant branch members were always well informed about industry happenings and issues.

"His support for 'one-and-all' while showing a ton of common sense made him our go-to guy. His contributions at both branch and national levels have been outstanding, making his nomination for NZDFA life membership well-deserved, supported wholeheartedly by the Kaipara branch."

## Edmund Noonan



**KEEN SUPPORTER:** Ed Noonan was an avid supporter of the NZDFA and the Canterbury-West Coast branch, from which he retired last year after serving 30 years on the branch committee. At branch level, he was an active and generous contributor, coordinating many field days and workshops. He was pivotal in the running of two successful Focus Farm projects. At a national level, he contributed to special deer farming interest topics; Johnes, and farm quality management, which led to farm environmental management plans. In more recent times, he had been involved in He Waka Eke Noa and in ECan discussions around the auditing of water and environmental farm plans.

## Bill Taylor



**FARMER ADVOCATE:** Losing money due to the collapse of Venison New Zealand Cooperative Limited paved the way for Southland farmer Bill Taylor's involvement in deer farming politics. He lost about \$14,000 of stock and was one of many farmers affected. After being shoulder-tapped to join the liquidator's committee of inspection, Taylor fought hard to get a payout (14 cents of every dollar owed) to farmer suppliers. His advocacy on behalf of farmers led to DFA leadership; he was chair of the Southland branch from 2000–2003 and NZDFA Executive Committee Chair from 2008 – 2011. ■

## Jock Richmond



**HONOURED:** Central Regions DFA Branch Chair Mike Humphrey presented Jock Richmond with life membership at a May branch meeting.

Following the deer industry conference, Jock Richmond was awarded life membership by the Central Regions DFA branch. At the presentation, granddaughter Maia Richmond said that deer farming had been his all-consuming way of life for 44 years.

“He’s been in the industry from the beginning, and he’s stuck with deer through the good times and bad ...it’s something he won’t let go of,” she said.

The 88-year-old still keeps tabs on deer and the Richmond’s farming business, based in Apiti in northern Manawatu (see page 20).

Jock’s legacy will live on, Maia said.

“His vision has created a pathway for future generations.”



**GIFTED:** Honorary and life member awards at this year's conference included a presentation boxed set of engraved crystal tumblers.



# Apiti move opens door for next generation

Tony Leggett, *Deer Industry News* writer

When 88-year-old Jock Richmond shot his first deer as a youngster hunting in the Tararua Ranges above Te Horo, he had no idea that 70 years later, two further generations of his family would be running one of the country's largest farmed venison operations.

## The Richmond Family

Jock; Tom; Abi, and children Bradley, Maia and Courtney

Deer, cattle, sheep breeding/finishing/trading at Apiti, northern Manawatu, on almost 1000ha across four farms

- Waimaire (290ha) - mostly hind breeding along with cattle and sheep breeding/finishing
- Wairere (120ha) - mostly weaner finishing
- Braecroft (210ha) - bull beef breeding/finishing
- Donaghmore (362ha) - sheep and cattle breeding/finishing

Tom oversees the wider farming business; Maia, manages the deer finishing; and Bradley manages the beef operation. Courtney, along with Abi, manages compliance and admin.

His son Tom, who farms with his wife, Abi, and their three children, Courtney, Maia and Bradley, is close to consolidating all of their farming activity into nearly 1000 hectares at Apiti in northern Manawatu and closing the chapter on the Kapiti Coast where it all started.

Jock was four when he moved with his parents and five siblings from Hawke's Bay to Te Horo. As the oldest son, he took over running the family's 350ha hill country property, Longcroft, and later bought other blocks of land, including a neighbouring dairy unit, and installed two broiler chicken sheds in the early seventies.

While his passion for hunting remained, Jock was soon hearing about other farmers catching and farming feral deer. When the market for

live deer took off in the late seventies, he was keen to cash in.

Together with Neil Mercer, who was trapping deer on a neighbouring farm, they built traps in the bush surrounding Longcroft. They captured good numbers of deer, which were then moved to Flock House near Bulls, where deer research was underway.

He still has fond memories of the hair-raising antics undertaken to catch the trapped deer to load them into a crate for transporting.

"We used to round them up by driving them into a small race made from car cases and corrugated iron. It was more like the Wild West back then," he says.

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**"We used to round them up by driving them into a small race made from car cases and corrugated iron. It was more like the Wild West back then."**

Jock Richmond

Within two years, Flock House's deer unit was fully stocked, so they bought a 9ha block of land near their dairy farm, tidied it up, and fenced it with deer netting.

"That block had a lot of natural cover. We grew barley to break in the ground for the first year and converted an old hay shed into a deer yard with a dark room," Tom says.

They recall the heady days in the early eighties, when people would arrive in helicopters wanting to buy captured deer and were



**A FAMILY AFFAIR:** Three generations of the Richmond family, from L to R: Jock, Courtney, Abi and Tom, Maia and Bradley.



willing to pay \$3000 for young hinds and a lot more for stags suitable as sires.

“I can still remember taking a stag over to Flemington in Hawke’s Bay to a farm owned by a doctor who was happy to pay us \$12,000 for a captured stag. We couldn’t afford not to take it really; it was money for jam,” Jock says.

As their confidence in the deer industry grew, so too did the area they fenced for deer. They completed fencing 252ha of their Longcroft property, all by hand, often topping up sheep fences.

Even when live deer prices crashed almost overnight in 1987, their confidence did not waiver. Venison production gave them a useful diversification from relying on dairy, red meat, and chicken production.

As venison production grew each year off their Te Horo properties, they began tweaking sheep and beef cattle numbers to suit the workload and carrying capacity. Sheep almost disappeared at one stage but returned to consume the ragwort which had started to appear.

When venison markets bombed in the early 1990s, they had already built up a herd of about 120 velvet stags, which helped fill the cash gap. Tom and Abi set up a baleage contracting business with a neighbour, later buying their share out, and spent five years sharemilking on the family’s dairy farm.

But as that was coming to an end, venison markets had bounced back, and they decided to re-fence the 60ha dairy block to run more deer.

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## The pasture growth curve at Apiti suits deer breeding and finishing better than at Te Horo.

When two of their three children showed interest in a career in farming, they were encouraged to study and work off the home farms.

Bradley and Maia both completed cadetships at Otiwhiti Station near Hunterville and worked on farms around the country. Courtney chose a different path, graduating from Waikato University with a performing arts and literature degree followed by a Masters, before working in a range of education, administration and management roles in Hamilton.

### Weaner finishing

Weaners spend from the start of July for at least 80 days grazing kale supplemented with baleage and barley, fed from Advantage Feeders in the paddock. The crop is strip grazed using hot wires in 2- to 5-day breaks, depending on weather.

Average slaughter weight has improved by 2-3kg to 53kg since they began finishing at Apiti.



**LOTS OF WEANERS:** A mob of 400 mixed-sex weaner deer grazing a paddock of feed oats in autumn. This year, almost 1000 weaners will be finished for supply to First Light’s Halal programme.

“The weaners winter on crops on good productive easy country, but we also have hills for them to run around on too. They are more relaxed, and their whole mental status is better up here,” Maia says.

“By 4pm each day, they are doing laps around one of our hill paddocks like a racetrack. They’re playing and just loving it.”

Having a truck to cart all their own deer and their proximity to the Feilding processing facility means they are often called on at short notice to top up a day’s kill.

Their first load of deer for processing is usually ready by mid to late September, and they aim to have a load every two weeks

through to late March. Deer are drafted on liveweight up until late December, and the remaining consignments are selected on eye.

Hinds spend all year at Waimaire in an area suited to fawning hinds, with good cover and warmth at lower altitude.

Finding enough weaners to buy that qualify for their First Light contract is increasingly challenging. Tom says the continued decline in hind numbers nationally is a concern, and he’s worried that the surge in sheep and beef returns could exacerbate the problem.

Any weaners bought in have to be from audited properties to ensure they comply with First Light’s animal welfare standards.

“That already restricts where we can buy from, but with numbers dropping, a lot of those farmers are now keeping more of their progeny to finish themselves,” Maia says.

They aim for weaners above 55kg at weaning, either pre or post roar. Their choice of a First Light Halal contract was deliberate because it gives them the opportunity to slaughter deer down to 42kg if conditions turn dry.

Fortunately, the historic surge in the venison schedule leading into spring has stabilised more in recent seasons, smoothing out weaner deer prices too. It also means they can take some lighter weaners that should reach acceptable slaughter weight in January or February, and they won’t be penalised by a weak schedule.

They are committed First Light suppliers and believe the company is providing good transparency and reward for the extra effort that goes into meeting the supply requirements.

“We’ve had five audits in the past two years, so we know how to keep good records. But that also opens the door to significant premiums,” Maia says.

Although their Te Horo farms had delivered growth and equity growth from buying and selling land, farming at scale was becoming increasingly challenging in the district, especially with rising land values from the northern drift of Wellington residents.

## Turning point

A severe drought in 2018-19 sealed their decision to look elsewhere for breeding country to balance out their fertile flats at Te Horo.

Their older cows were slaughtered, and the rest went to grazing blocks. The deer got through on supplement, mostly baleage that would have been fed to the cows.

“We initially wanted land close by so we could retain most of our Te Horo properties and float stock between them,” Tom says.

“We ended up looking in Hawke’s Bay and Wairarapa, but we were competing with pine tree companies, and that was challenging.”

When they spotted Waimaire, a mostly deer-fenced 290ha hill country farm at Apiti in northern Manawatu, was for sale in 2019, they admit they had to check on the map to find its location.

“We had a conversation with Bradley, who was working near Ohakune at the time, and asked him if he would come on board if we bought the farm at Apiti. It was a turning point for him, and he was keen to be involved,” Abi says.

They also bought the hinds off the previous owners, John and Shirley Goodall, and for the next two years, all their fawns went to Te Horo for finishing.

## The family is still considering priorities for development, including adding more deer fencing to achieve their goal of breeding and finishing 1000 deer each year.

But with two hours driving time between Te Horo and Apiti, they could see the advantage of having all their land in one area. Apiti was just over 30 minutes from Feilding, which has a full farm service support network, and processing plants for venison, beef and lambs.



**THE NEXT GENERATION:** Bradley, Maia and Courtney share the workload on the family's deer, beef and sheep farming business at Apiti.

Jock says the pasture growth curve at Apiti suits deer breeding and finishing better than at Te Horo.

“The winters are longer, maybe 120 days versus 80-90 at Te Horo, but the growth in spring at Apiti is better on average, and that’s what we need for finishing weaners,” he says.

At the highest point, their land reaches 560 metres above sea level, and two or more snowfalls each winter are expected.

To build scale, the family has bought three other properties in the Apiti district.

Wairere is a 120ha property bought just over two years ago, where most of the weaners are finished; Braecroft, a 210ha property which is set up primarily for bull beef and run by Bradley; and their most recent purchase, Donaghmore, 362ha with no deer fencing but almost half is easy contour.

Their bull beef operation has 300 cows and more than 600 trading cattle, and they also run about 2000 ewes, including 800 Wiltshire ewes and replacements.

Tom says the family is still considering priorities for development, including adding more deer fencing to achieve their goal of breeding and finishing 1000 deer each year.

They are wintering close to 550 hinds across their Apiti deer-fenced area, and almost 1000 weaners, which will be finished for a First Light Halal contract. Hinds are all mated to terminal sire Eastern blood stags, mostly from Melior and Wilkins Farming studs.

With a strong venison schedule, boosted with premiums from First Light, they are content to run a terminal system. Replacement hinds are high breeding worth first-calvers, mostly bought from Melior, and last year cost \$780/head.

## Family focus

Courtney shares the compliance, environmental policy and administrative work with her mother, Abi, since returning home in early 2025. Growing up around farming, she’s also an extra farm labour unit when required.

The family meets early most Monday mornings, usually around the kitchen table at one of the farms, to discuss the week ahead.



**PAVED THE WAY:** Hard work and smart moves by Jock (left), daughter-in-law Abi and son Tom have set the scene for the next generation.

They use Resolution, a specialist farm software system, to keep on top of compliance and administration tasks.

Tom and Abi still live at Te Horo but will soon move permanently to Apiti. Jock enjoys his regular visits to Apiti and contributes wisdom and energy to the conversations. He's still happy out on the farm and says he is immensely proud of the family's achievements.

Tom and Abi say staying in Te Horo would never have delivered the opportunity to involve all three of their children in the farming business. Now they have their first grandchild, there's a new generation to consider as well.

"We'll stop buying land for a while. We've got enough, and it's time to consolidate, re-develop parts of it, and get the right infrastructure in place," Tom says.

Building a larger velvet herd is also an option under consideration. They know velvet stag feed demands would fit the Apiti pasture growth curve nicely.

## Challenges ahead

- Finding enough good quality weaners for finishing
- Ensuring two North Island processing plants remain viable
- Managing workload through the next development phase
- Handling rising compliance requirements ■



**LIVE CAPTURE BEGINNINGS:** Jock started trapping deer at the back of his Te Horo farm in the seventies. The family business has developed into one of the largest venison production enterprises in the country.

## No one-trick pony

At Melior, we've been accused of breeding hinds that are too big to handle a hard hill and high country. Instead of ignoring that feedback, we've done something about it, adding the hardiness of English genetics to our proven fast-growth genetics.

These dual genetics deliver the best for your farming operation: fast growing, good meat yielding, hardy and resilient deer, right at home in tussock high country.

We call our deer "match-fit" for good reason. We run them under strict commercial conditions, with little intervention, such as drenching, so you can be certain they'll cope whatever the conditions.

Our breeding objective is to put more money in your pocket by keeping the focus on fast-growth and carcass traits, conformation and temperament. We invest heavily in our genetics to stay ahead of the game, overseeing an annual comprehensive embryo transfer and artificial insemination programme. We also spend a lot of

time measuring and recording large numbers of our deer for the productive parameters that matter: EMA (eye muscle area) and CARLA, in conjunction with live weight, to ensure our progeny remains at the front of the pack.

Our genetics team, onboard since Day One, continue to evolve, meticulously measuring and recording the Melior breeding plan. There's no guesswork, just truth – backed by the numbers that matter most, giving you full confidence that what we say is real and proven.

If you still don't believe us, believe our BVs. Better still, believe our animals. ■

*Editorial supplied.*

**PGG Wrightson**

**Melior 9th Annual In-calf Hind Sale | 1pm Tuesday, 8 July 2025**

Approx 450 R2 and R3 high growth rate (HGR) hinds in-calf to HGR sires. 30+ (12-month weight BV)

**Enquires to Tom Macfarlane (027 600 8555) or your local deer agent.**





# Just add deer

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The introduction of deer to a sheep and beef system with existing deer infrastructure was the topic of a South Canterbury field day in May.

Co-facilitator and DINZ Industry Capability Project Manager Sarah O'Connell said the day was an opportunity for farmers to get an understanding of what it would take to bring back deer breeding or finishing, or expand an existing system.

Farm consultant Wayne Allan set the scene for the crowd of around 60, saying that a three-way livestock mix provided alternative revenue streams that spread risk, noting that venison prices are seldom linked to lamb and beef prices.

About half of Allan's clients had mixed livestock systems including deer, with deer comprising 30 percent or more on some farms. From his experience, a breeding hind generated a better return than a breeding ewe.

"My observation is that deer returns outstrip sheep and beef returns three or four years out of every five," he said.

The caveat was that the tough years in deer farming tended to be "very tough", an example being the Covid-induced price slump. However, the reversal of fortunes last year, when lamb prices languished and venison prices increased, showed how diversification could reduce financial exposure and the ebb and flow impact of red meat markets.



**LOOK & SEE:** The field day was an opportunity for farmers to hear what's involved in bringing deer back to a farm with existing deer infrastructure, Sarah O'Connell said.

## 1.7 – 2 ewes = 1 breeding hind

For most farmers, diversification conversations start and end with the financial costs and benefits. Allan addressed the financial considerations with an estimate and comparison of revenue generated by a breeding hind and a finished deer. The

### A word of warning

The buy-in price of young stock was a major contributor to the margins made by finishers. Allan warned that the margins for lamb, cattle and deer could be squeezed this season due to competing demand and increased prices in the store markets. For finishing margins to hold, meat processors will need to lift schedule prices, he said.

"That's why some weaner deer finishers are sitting out the market this year. They feel the price has gone beyond a profitable level for them."

typical return, or gross margin, quantified the income from each kilogram of drymatter (kg/dm) eaten after deduction of relevant expenses sheep, deer and cattle generated in both a hill breeding and a finishing system.

### Typical return/gross margin for an average efficient operation

Livestock class	Current c/kgDM	10-year range c/kgDM
Breeding hind	16 - 18	10 - 20
Breeding ewe	16	11.5 - 18
Breeding cow	15	10 - 16
Finished deer	26 - 35	slower vs faster growth
Finished lamb	27 - 33	
Finished cattle	15 - 28	R2 usually higher than R1

Source: Allan Agricultural

## Hill breeding margins and feeding

Making good margins from breeding livestock hinged on good feeding at peak demand, Allan said.

"In my mind, birth to weaning is when our breeding stock actually makes the money. If they are not well fed through this time, weaning weights will be lower, and returns will plummet."

Therefore, the success of a mixed breeding system requires a good understanding of the growing environment, the feed growth curve, and how that correlates to the feed demands of a ewe, hind and cow.

He explained that ewe feed demand increases approximately 250% between early winter, while peak demand is around tailing time. However, hind feed demand is relatively constant over winter and doesn't peak until mid-lactation over January/February. Over this summer period, daily feed demand typically increases by 180 percent, from 2.8 kgDM to 5 kgDM, and stays at this level until weaning from late February.

Allan gave examples of how a farmer could use feed demand knowledge in the management of hinds and ewes. During early spring, hinds could be held on crop to free up grazing space for ewes



**SPREAD THE RISK:** Adding deer to a sheep and beef farm adds an income stream and spreads risk. Lamb, beef and venison prices are generally unrelated, so a price slump in one market was offset by higher prices in another market, Wayne Allan said.

over their final weeks of pregnancy. However, hinds would become the priority class from mid-January, to ensure both the hind and fawn achieved good liveweights by weaning. On farms prone to summer-dry, that could mean growing specialist forage crops, such as rape or lucerne, and/or feeding grain to fill any feed gap.

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## Once maintenance liveweight is achieved, it takes about 4 kgDM to add another kilogram of liveweight.

“This is the one period when an investment can be justified because it will ensure a reasonable fawn weaning weight and that hinds will get back in fawn, which are both key drivers of profitability.”

## Finishing margins

Deer and lamb finishers typically targeted a return of between 25 and 35 c/kgDM, Allan said. The higher margin compared to a breeding enterprise reflects the higher value land and the higher feeding costs associated with finishing.

In the past, deer finishers have targeted the spring market because of the \$1.50 - \$2.50/kg premium compared to autumn prices. However, in recent years the premium had dropped to around \$1/kg. This had reduced spring throughput, although finishers in summer-dry regions have continued to target this period.

Growth rate was critical to the success of a finishing system.

“The faster an animal grows, the lower the proportion of feed that goes into maintenance. Feed quality is therefore critical,” Allan said.

He mentioned AgResearch trials that highlighted the importance of feed quality. The research (Stevens et al) indicated that feed with metabolisable energy (ME) of nine was sufficient to maintain weight on lambs, but pasture or forage crops with a higher ME were needed to add weight. Every unit increase in ME above maintenance added another 100 grams of liveweight, therefore lambs on a 12 ME crop could be expected to add another 300 grams a day. It was similar logic for fawns and calves, which are also highly sensitive to feed quality. In simple terms, once maintenance liveweight is achieved, it takes about 4 kgDM to add another kilogram of liveweight gain, he said.

Weaner deer had a relatively flat feed demand from weaning until early spring, starting out at a daily requirement of about 2kgDM/day and increasing to 3kgDM.

He said that a dual deer-and-lamb finishing system could work well because of the workflow and complementary feed growth and demand.

“Most of the deer are finished by lamb weaning, allowing concentration on lambs in January and February before transitioning to deer again in March and April.”

## Levers to pull

A reoccurring message was how a mixed livestock system with deer created flexibility and “more levers to pull”. A farmer speaker, Clayton Station’s Hamish Orbell, said flexibility meant the ability to offload stock and/or reprioritise feeding according to the season.

“But you have to look out for the warning flags, because if you leave things too late, you will run into problems.”

He used the example of making the decision to move cattle out of Clayton’s 1600-hectare deer fenced block before summer-dry conditions kicked in.

“You need to get them out sooner rather than later. Otherwise, the danger is that there will be no feed left for the deer, and you’ll end up having to replace that feed with more expensive supplements.”



*LANEWAYS: Fencing for laneways is expensive but makes moving deer easier, Hamish Orbell said.*

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**“...birth to weaning is when our breeding stock actually makes the money. If they are not well fed through this time, weaning weights will be lower, and returns will plummet.”**

Wayne Allan

Allan added that flexibility required attention to stocking rates, especially with deer who couldn’t be moved outside of a deer-fenced area. For this reason, he recommended capping deer numbers within the fenced area at 70–80 percent capacity.

An integrated mixed livestock system created more levers to pull,



*LISTENING IN: Around 60 people attended the field day.*



regardless of the scale of operation, field day host Tom Macfarlane said. Macfarlane and wife Sam farm deer, sheep and cattle, with the primary focus on deer breeding. The enterprise is run across two farms: The Kowhais, a finishing farm between Fairlie and Pleasant Point; and Stanton Station, a high country and hill deer, sheep and cattle breeding property at Kimbell.

The Macfarlanes took on a 12-year lease of Stanton Station in 2021, and since then have developed feeding systems in sync with livestock classes, the environment, and seasonal conditions. From experience, there were a number of benefits: more regular cash flow, spreading the workload – although Macfarlane noted that seemed to be year-round now – and sustainability in terms of parasite management.

“There’s also flexibility in feed management, because you can shift and move animals according to their demand and fitting that to the feed growth curve.”

He gave the example of winding back feed for hinds during cold springs when feed was tight, while ramping up feed for ewes as they approached lambing. Another example, which played out last year during the dry summer, was the decision to wean cows and calves and ewes and lambs early. The cows and ewes no longer needed priority feeding and were put back on the hill country while the young stock were shifted on to pasture at The Kowhais. Meanwhile the hinds and fawns, both priority classes in the lead up to weaning and mating, were kept on high quality pasture and crops and supplements. ■



**BENEFITS:** Regular cash flow, spreading of the workload, and sustainable parasite management were the main benefits of an integrated mixed livestock system, field day host Tom Macfarlane said.

## Fencing tips

Grazing deer, cattle and sheep has its challenges, but for Hamish Orbell, the three-way mix generally works well on the extensively run Clayton Station. Deer used to have exclusive rights to 1600ha deer block, but over the last few years, cattle and sheep had been integrated throughout the year. He offered fencing tips and thoughts based on past experience and his current project of deer fencing more of Clayton’s sheep area.



**ENVIRONMENT FOCUS:** At Clayton Station wetlands, creeks and critical source areas are fenced to exclude stock.

“The (new) fencing is not solely for deer, but they’re a big part of what we do,” he said.

He recommended fencing for laneways if possible. They cost a bit more but they’re a godsend for deer “because they make moving them a lot easier.”

He noted how subdivision and the decision on where to place new fences lines made in line with environmental considerations. At Clayton, they had progressively fenced off wetlands, creeks and critical source areas.

“Nowadays, we think more from an environmental perspective, and that’s no disrespect to previous generations; it’s just the way farming has moved with the increased environmental knowledge and awareness.”



**COMPLEMENTARY:** A dual deer and lamb finishing system could work well because of the workflow and complementary feed growth and demand, Tom Macfarlane said. Photo: Anna Munro



**FLEXIBLE:** In dry summers, Stanton Station cows and calves can be weaned early and the cows put back on the hill country to reduce feed pressure. Photo: Anna Munro



# IFP project on a roll

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Getting “bums on seats” at deer-specific farm planning workshops has been a highlight for DINZ Industry Capability Manager Sarah O’Connell.

“It took a while to get them up-and-running, but we’re on a roll now and really making an impact,” she says.

O’Connell stepped into the year-long maternity leave role at the end of October, picking up from Sara Elmes in the design and roll out of the workshops throughout the country. So far, 98 farmers from 81 farm businesses have completed the two- or three-day workshops aimed at arming farmers with an almost ready-to-go farm plan.

“There’s been a lot to do, and not a lot of time to do it in, so it’s been all hands on deck.”

The time constraint arises because of the March 2026 deadline attached to the Ministry for Primary Industries’ Integrated Farm Planning Accelerator funding. DINZ was granted \$700,000 to build awareness of farm planning, delivering workshops and specific modules to build farmer confidence in farm plans.

The Freshwater Farm Mapping and Planning workshops, co-sponsored by Ballance Agri-Nutrients, provide an overview of the purpose of a freshwater farm plan and how it is developed to meet various requirements, before delving into the practical details, such as how to set up enterprise details and explain the farm story; how to map land units; how to assess risk from a certifier’s perspective; how to develop actions as part of a farm plan; and how to use the QCONZ system to build an electronic freshwater farm plan.

Most of the workshops to date have had a freshwater emphasis, however feedback following a farmer survey at the end of last year has led to the addition of new modules in animal health, soil and nutrient management, and pest and biosecurity.

“We’re mindful of covering what is relevant and real to farmers, and we want them to be confident with the information presented and have tools they can take away and use,” O’Connell says.

The first animal health workshop, held in Hawke’s Bay, had lots of practical discussion and tips on developing an animal health plan, as well as how to implement and manage it throughout the year.

“Most farmers have this kind of information in their head, so these types of workshops are an opportunity to get the information recorded in a document that can be provided as proof to regulators or as part of a farm assurance programme.”

Two pest and disease-themed workshops are planned for Canterbury during July under the biosecurity banner. The workshops will explore the practical perspective of managing pests – wild pigs, rabbits, feral deer – and how to manage diseases



**COMING SOON:** More farm planning workshops and new topics will be introduced in the coming months, Sarah O’Connell says.

they could bring on farm, such as TB and Johnes. OSPRI will cover farmer obligations from a NAIT perspective.

“We see this workshop as timely and relevant. The potentially devastating impact of TB and Johnes on deer farms hasn’t been front of mind, but the recent experience and effects of *M. bovis* on the dairy industry is a stark reminder that we can’t be complacent.”

As part of the farm planning funding, deer farmers can complete a rapid assessment – a free, two-hour consultation with an accredited consultant who will assess any gaps that need to be addressed for certification under the NZ Farm Assurance Programme (NZFAP and NZFAP Plus).

“It’s intended to give farmers a snapshot view of where they are in terms of risk management and compliance,” O’Connell explains.

About a dozen farmers have taken up the offer so far, and O’Connell is keen for more farmers to sign up for the free initiative. ■

For more information on farm planning, go to: [deernz.org.nz/deer-hub/support-services/farm-planning](https://deernz.org.nz/deer-hub/support-services/farm-planning)

## Rapid Assessment - why wouldn't you?

The rapid assessment consultation gave Nicole Ewan a snapshot view of where the farm was compliance-wise and the gaps that needed to be filled to achieve NZFAP Plus.

“I think that if an industry body is offering to fund things that will help sort regulation and compliance, it’s silly not to take up the offer,” she says.

Ewan and husband Andrew farm sheep, beef, deer and grow some crops near Huntly in Waikato. They completed a rapid assessment in late April to identify any gaps in preparation for NZFAP Plus certification. The process was straightforward – a Microsoft Teams meeting with a consultant, using the Ewans’ environmental farm plan as a basis for the discussion. Following the meeting, a summary report was sent outlining the key points and areas requiring attention.

“The rapid assessment was a good way to get an idea of where we were compliance-wise,” Ewan says.

“We have a few things to do around the mapping of critical source areas and biodiversity but nothing major. We were aware of these gaps but now need to act and document it.”

A bit more paperwork but not a lot of money will be needed for NZFAP Plus certification, which although not generating premiums is “a way of substantiating the ‘clean and green’ narrative,” she says.



# Time to shine

The tenacity, passion and ability of deer farmers to protect and enhance the environment on which their production hubs are based was once again highlighted in the biennial Deer Industry Environmental Awards. Lead judge and MPI regional adviser Janet Gregory said this year's five entrants covered the country, from South Canterbury to Poverty Bay, and deer farming systems that for the first time included deer milking. "The mix of land class, climates, and operations showcased the versatility of deer and the passion that each of the landowners has for deer farming," Gregory said.

## Winners

**Premier Elworthy Environmental Award and The Streamlands Export Award for leading environmentally sustainable velvet farming.**

*David and Jan Morgan and family, Raincliff Station, South Canterbury*



**STRONG UNIT:** The Morgan family is an effective farming team with a long-term vision for environmental and economic sustainability, judges said.

Award judges described the Morgan family as "passionate farmers who had successfully balanced economic and environmental management" on 755ha Raincliff Station and its adjacent 150ha lease block. The family, led by David and Jan, have a clear vision of being profitable and sustainable, and they enjoy what they do and have achieved. Judges were impressed with the diverse income streams: velvet and trophy stag production; terminal venison sire breeding; calf rearing; beef cattle finishing; and dairy heifer grazing, each featuring excellent stock management that was in tune with the land type.

"The family is open about the challenges they face in achieving their farming goals and keep each other on their toes," noted the judges.



Ministry for Primary Industries  
Manatū Ahu Matua



**NZ Landcare Trust Award for excellence in sustainable deer farming through actions on the ground.**

*Kim and Judith Rowe, Brookfields, Nelson*



**JOB DONE WELL:** The Rowes have done an excellent job of securing grants and budgeting for environmental improvements over several years, judges said.

The large area of QEII covenant-protected beech-podocarp forest running alongside the Stanley Brook Stream was a standout feature for award judges.

"Judith and Kim have been successful in getting a range of funding over a number of years to help control weeds and pests in these areas," judges said.

The Rowes breed and finish red deer, as well as finish cattle, on 503ha (386ha effective) easy hill country and flat terraces in the Motueka Valley. They demonstrated excellent management of risk areas, including the retirement of vulnerable areas, construction of wetlands, and plantings to protect soil and water. The couple also take social responsibility seriously, with many people in the community given the opportunity to learn about deer farming and the management steps taken to protect and enhance the significant ecological areas on their farm.





## Duncan New Zealand Limited Award for vision and management whilst mastering a demanding environment.

*Charles and Jane Rau, Matawai Deer Park, Gisborne*



**SHARING:** The Rauses actively share their environmental goals. They are founding members of a local catchment group and have worked hard to secure funding that is shared to benefit the wider rural community.

Exemplary teamwork lies at the heart of Matawai Deer Park's environmental success.

"This farm is run well and has great systems in place to ensure it is resilient and sustainable long-term," judges said.

The Rauses pay tribute to Charles' parents, who established the 400ha rolling hill country and river flat farm, as they push forward with environmental enhancement work. Newly planted and thriving wetland areas are enhancing biodiversity and improving nutrient management. The Rauses are committed to environmental education; they established a greenhouse at the local school to give the children the opportunity to learn how to grow and care for trees and have invited them to tree planting days on the farm.



## NZDFA Next Generation Award for excellent performance across environmental, financial, and social aspects of the business.

*Dwight Adlam, Mangahao Deer Company, Shannon*



**INVOLVED:** Dwight Adlam's involvement in Next Generation activities, plus his sharing and showcasing of good farm management practices, impressed judges.

A standout feature of Mangahao Deer Company's rolling hill country farm is the deer wintering barn, a crucial tool for managing pasture and protecting soils during the wettest months. The farm is in a challenging wind-prone, high rainfall, and clay soil environment, but the well-designed barn helped mitigate these risk factors, judges said.

Adlam, a second-generation deer farmer, impressed the judges with his willingness to push beyond his comfort zone and take opportunities, such as entering the environmental awards, hosting field days, preparing a freshwater farm plan, and embarking on FAP Plus certification.



## Gallagher Technology and Innovation Award for excellent utilisation of farming technologies to improve farm productivity and manage resources.

*Rebecca Davidson, Deer Milking NZ/Peel Forest Estate, South Canterbury*



**VISIONARY:** The Deer Milking NZ team has worked hard to push new ideas and create new opportunities for the deer industry, judges said.

The Deer Milking NZ team: Rebecca Davidson, Simon Wakefield, Mark Faulks and Graham Carr have combined their skills to develop one of the world's first commercial-scale deer milking operations. They have adopted a pasture-to-plate quality assurance approach to ensure both the health and happiness of the deer and the long-term sustainability of the land, judges said. A good example of this is the management system that allows fawns to remain with their mothers strategically throughout the milking season in the milking and barn facility built in 2024.

"The ongoing investment in research, commercial development, genetics, and infrastructure reflects commitment to continuous improvement and knowledge-sharing within the wider deer industry." ■





# Southern winter management reminders

Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Focus on good winter management practices to protect paddocks, waterways and minimise run-off is the timely reminder from DINZ Environmental Stewardship Manager Luka Jansen.

“Farmers can’t control the weather, but they can control good farming practices – for example, which paddocks are used for their winter crops,” Jansen says.

Rain and mud are part-and-parcel of winter farming, and Jansen reminds deer farmers – especially in Southland – of the need for following best management practices to avoid any sediment run-off into waterways.



**RECOMMENDED READING:**  
Luka Jansen encourages Southland farmer to read *Smart wintering in Southland*.

She notes that the proposed Southland Water and Land Plan requires all farmers to have a documented plan for intensive winter grazing. Many farmers have, or are well on the way to achieving, this requirement. In the meantime, her advice is for farmers to read “Smart wintering in Southland” ([www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/69174/direct](http://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/69174/direct)) to check the requirements.

Southern farmers tend to bear the brunt of the cold, wet winter, and Jansen says it was good on a recent Southland visit to meet farmers who had a solid plan in place for winter management, including Ballance Farm Environmental Award regional winner Cam Nelson.

“It was great to hear Cam sharing his winter grazing practices, which award judges said had dramatically improved through the development of a wintering shed and a winter hind pad, which minimises mud, pasture damage and improves animal welfare,” she says.

**Keep mob sizes small and get animals into those mobs a couple of weeks before winter feeding starts, so the social hierarchy is sorted.**

The Nelsons have two sheds for wintering stags and a 1200sqm feed pad for wintering 150–200 hinds, both of which keep deer comfortably contained, sheltered, and off pastures. Swedes and fodder beet crops (8ha each) are grown and break-fed to various mobs from early June.

Cam Nelson says best practice winter management for crops starts with paddock selection. While that was too late to change for winter 2025, farmers could keep a close eye on paddocks they were considering for 2026 winter crops, checking for any drainage

or ponding issues that might make it unsuitable.

“I found the overland flow was too great on one of the paddocks I wanted to use for winter crop, so I put it in red clover for baleage, which is fed out in the winter sheds,” he said.

Regardless of how deer were wintered – in a shed, on a feed pad, or on crop – it was important to keep the mob size as small as possible and to get the animals into those mobs a couple of weeks before winter feeding started.

**“Farmers can’t control the weather, but they can control good farming practices.”**

Luka Jansen

“If you get the deer sorted into mobs before you start putting them on crop or in the shed, it gives them time to sort their social rankings before being contained in a more confined space,” he says.

In another positive animal welfare move, baled toppings from hind fawning paddocks are used for bedding in the two wintering sheds.

“We also use some of the baled toppings on the crop paddocks when the weather is rough. This helps to create a dry place to sleep on and helps reduce run-off and sediment loss,” Nelson says.

Another sediment busting tool Nelson has seen used to good effect is strategically-placed hay bales across swale and gully exit points.

The correct fencing and feeding of a crop, along the contours and not up/down the slope, and the feeding of the crop, from the top of the paddock, were understood by most but worthy of repeating, he says. ■

There are several handy Deer Fact sheets on winter grazing management and good environmental practice at: [deernz.org.nz/deer-hub/farm-and-environment/wintering-feed-systems](http://deernz.org.nz/deer-hub/farm-and-environment/wintering-feed-systems)



**COMFORTABLY CONTAINED:** Cam Nelson's feed pad keeps hinds comfortably contained and off pasture during the winter.

# CSA deer fencing helps keep waterways clean

Trevor Walton, *Deer Industry News* writer

Mud is an inevitable part of winter on a deer farm. The challenge is to prevent it from being washed into waterways, where it becomes a major source of contaminants. Invermay scientists have been looking at ways to do this without breaking the bank.



**TWO FACTORS:** Water flow and a source of contamination drive waterway pollution, Richard Muirhead says.

A five-year study by AgResearch shows that even temporary winter fencing of critical source areas (CSAs) in hill country can help to reduce the flow of contaminants into waterways. But the best results by far come from permanently fencing these areas. CSAs are those wet and boggy areas, the creeks and hollows, that deer like to play in – the places most likely to generate sediment that contaminates waterways.

Study leader, water quality scientist Richard Muirhead, says two factors drive waterway pollution: a source of contamination and water flow. The CSA concept is based on the premise that 80 percent of the contamination comes from 20 percent of the farm. The study explored how effective exclusion fences are in preventing waterway contamination on hill country pasture and – with permanent deer fencing costing between \$15,000 and \$30,000 a kilometre – whether there might be some cheaper options. Previous research with intensively grazed forage crops has shown it’s possible to reduce contaminant losses by 36-80 percent by creating riparian buffer zones around CSAs and adopting some fairly simple break-feeding techniques (See Deer Fact: ‘Intensive

winter feeding’). And yet, little was known about how to manage CSAs in permanent pasture. Talking to a workshop at the 2025 Deer Industry Conference, Muirhead said the study looked at four roughly parallel catchments on a hill slope at Invermay over four years. Through each catchment was a boggy depression with flowing water in wetter winter months. The CSA treatments were: a control (no fencing), fully fenced, winter-fenced only, and partial fencing (where only the lower part of the catchment was fenced). Over the four years of measurements, 1162 water samples were analysed for nitrogen, phosphorus, sediment and *E. coli*, contaminants which come from dung, urine, fertiliser and soil damage. Samples were taken during settled weather, to determine base-flow concentrations, and during storms, to determine ‘event’ loads. “With all treatments, water quality during storm flows was D grade for *E. coli*. In contrast, the base flow from the fully fenced catchment was A-grade for *E. coli*,” Muirhead said. ■



**PLAY SPACE:** CSAs are creeks, hollows and boggy areas that deer like to play in.

## Summary of contaminant reductions (%)

Detailed results are now being written up for publication, but the headline results are clear: CSA fencing works. It can cut sediment contamination by more than 80 per cent and *E. coli* by more than 90 per cent. Reductions in nitrogen and phosphorus run-off are more modest, but CSA protection does reduce all four main water quality contaminants. This will have multiple downstream water quality benefits for human health, stream health and habitat.

The drive to make waterways cleaner is not going away. Governments come and go, but the direction of travel stays the same. So, for farmers who struggle to fund permanent fencing of CSAs, the study also offers hope. Temporary and lower catchment fencing can deliver useful reductions in contaminants. The study was planned in consultation with the DINZ Environmental Research Steering Group and funded by MPI via the Sustainable Land Management and Climate Change (SLMACC) fund.

CSA Treatment	Nitrogen	Phosphorus	Sediment	E. coli
Temporary fencing	1	-21	28	34
Lower part fenced	17	15	51	56
Fully fenced	32	45	87	93

# Royal recognition

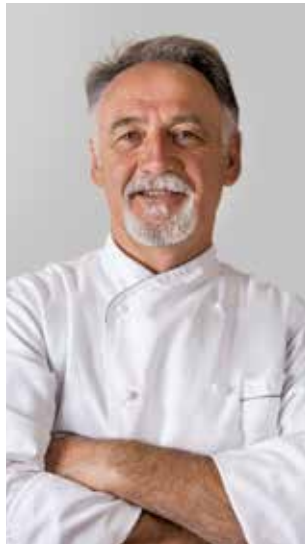
Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* Editor

DINZ executive chef Graham Brown says he was shocked to discover he'd been nominated for an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (ONZM) in the King's Birthday Honours.

"I got the first notification in an On His Majesty's Service envelope, and I thought, 'Bugger, I've got a ticket', so it was a shock to find it was a nomination for an ONZM," he says.

"A week before King's Birthday weekend, we got the official letters from the Prime Minister and the Governor General, so we had to keep it under wraps until the Monday."

The award acknowledged Brown's 40-year contribution to the food and hospitality industry, particularly as a global ambassador for New Zealand-farmed venison.



Brown says he is fortunate to have had such a long and varied career.

"I've met some fantastic people, from farmers through to chefs, in many countries. I never dreamt of seeing and learning so much on the way, from so many different cuisines."

Highlights include being a guest chef at the prestigious Rhingau Wine Festival in southern Germany, along with a group of Michelin star chefs; and working at the La Pyramide Restaurant at The Louvre when Sir Peter Blake was the guest speaker.

Travelling the world promoting premium New Zealand-farmed venison to chefs and suchlike has been an honour but not without the occasional glitch, he says.

"Not all events go to plan, and sometimes it's crazy. You get backed into corners and have to really improvise and use all your ingenuity to get the job done."

One such event was in Germany, hosted by Prime Meats' Gunther Bagowski, who asked Brown to do a venison presentation and lunch for about 24 chefs in Berlin. Brown, a history buff, was excited about the Berlin trip but less so about the "very fast" (200km/hr) trip to the venue in Bagowski's Ferrari.

"I love speed, but I have to say, I was a bit nervous. We got to the venue – the Berlin Olympic stadium where Hitler refused to shake Jesse Owens's hand – much later than planned."

The memorable stadium was matched by a memorable kitchen, but for all the wrong reasons.

"It was like Old Mother Hubbard's, completely bare except for a tray of food left in the oven with a fur coat of mildew," he recalls.

But there wasn't time to dwell on the kitchen's serious

shortcomings. Instead, Brown got to work, organising a "Greek guy who didn't speak English" to bring the salads, breads and condiments while he looked after the venison.

"I prepared the meats on the cardboard box lid while the German technicians fixed the stoves... I have never worked so hard and fast in my life."

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**"Not all events go to plan, and sometimes it's crazy. You get backed into corners and have to really improvise..."**

Lunch was served – on time – and well received by the discerning chefs, as was a post-lunch demo by Brown.

"We were lucky it was a fine day, so we set up a table for the guests far away from the sea of destruction in the kitchen," he says.

"I managed to do it in such a short time. I said to Gunther when it was all over 'Never again,' and his answer was 'But Graham, you are very good at improvisation,' at which point I wanted to strangle him"

He didn't, and adds that he and wife, Glenda, enjoy a close friendship with Gunther and his wife.

"They are one of the many great friendships forged over the many years I've been with the deer industry." ■

*Thanks Graham Vincent Brown (Brownie) for your enthusiasm, dedication and occasional acts of extreme improvisation in promoting premium New Zealand-farmed venison to the world.*

## Reindeer farming in Norway

David Seifert

Retired Ruapehu vet and deer farmer David Seifert, along with wife Alison, ticked off a bucket list item by visiting a reindeer farm in Norway in December last year.



**RUGGED UP:** David and Alison Seifert wrapped up and ready for a reindeer sleigh ride.



Since visiting Norway in 2015, when we learnt of the Sámi people and their close association with reindeer, I have been interested in visiting a reindeer farm. In December last year, we did just that, visiting a reindeer farm near Tromsø in Norway. Tromsø, a city of 70,000 people, is well north of the Arctic circle. Its streets are heated by underground water pipes, although the ground was covered with snow, and recent snowfalls meant loaders and trucks were busy clearing car parks and walkways. We were there during the polar night, a season – running from late November until mid-January – when the sun remains below the horizon, and each day there is only about four hours of pale twilight.

The reindeer farm we visited was run as a major tourist attraction during winter but was also a working farm. We were greeted by a Sámi reindeer herder who helped with the tourist operation and managing the 300 reindeer. He came from a family with 3000 reindeer, four to five hours south of Tromsø. It was much colder there, he said, and Tromsø, at -3°C seemed like summer temperatures to him.

**“We were fascinated to learn that the female reindeer grow antlers before winter to protect their young.”**

David Seifert

Reindeer have a highly attuned sense of smell so they can sniff out and dig through snow to forage the moss and grass beneath. However, climate change over the last 30 years has brought more warmer days in winter, causing a thaw-freeze cycle and an ice crust on the snow that the reindeer can't dig through. Consequently, the farm had resorted to hand feeding the reindeer throughout winter. They were wintered in one mob within a large, fenced enclosure, with several troughs used for the feeding of a pelleted mixture of lucerne and grass. They were fed four times a day, ensuring all got sufficient rations and reducing the likelihood of domineering behaviour from the older and larger animals.

The enclosure fence was a mesh, similar to that used around constructions sites, and was two metres high to keep out the predators. Our host explained there are five or six predators that posed a threat; eagles feed on newborn calves, but they were a protected species, meaning that farmers could not control them. Lynxes and wolverines attacked older reindeer. He said that on his family's farm, reindeer herding dogs kept the mob contained to reduce the predation risk. On the farm we visited, predators weren't a big problem, generally staying away because of the close proximity to the built-up area of Tromsø.

We were fascinated to learn that female reindeer grow antlers before winter to protect their young. They lose these sometime

after calving in early summer. The males grow antlers in summer. They fight for dominance and mating rights in autumn before losing their antlers pre-winter. We were also told that the large antlered sled-pulling reindeer, used in the tourist part of the operation, were castrated. They were kept separately from the other reindeer and fed extra well.

At the end of winter, the gates are opened, and the oldest lead reindeer takes the herd up into the mountains. In late autumn, the reindeer start arriving back and hang around the outside of the fence, waiting to be let in!

We enjoyed our brief visit to the reindeer farm and learning about the Sámi people's unique management system that's evolved in line with the changing polar climate. We would love to have ventured further afield to a larger-scale farm where they muster mobs of reindeer – perhaps next time! ■

## The Sámi and reindeer

Reindeer farming was a way of life for the Sámi, the indigenous people of northern Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. In days past, many families followed the animals on their migratory routes across traditional Sámi territory. However, changed government laws within Northern European bloc countries, along with pressure from large-scale mineral and forestry companies, has ousted the Sámi from their traditional farming territory.

As with all colonised indigenous people, the Norwegian government tried to assimilate the Sámi people by suppressing their culture and language from the mid-1800s. In 1980, following an official apology from the Norwegian government, a Sámi parliament was formed, leading to a resurgence in their culture and language. Five of the original seven Sámi languages are spoken, and all are quite distinct, meaning that a Northern Sámi speaker needs to use Norwegian or English to converse with a Middle Sámi speaker.

In Norway, only Sámi are allowed to own reindeer, but the number they can own is tightly regulated by the government and varies across districts. Reindeer in excess of the farmer's quota are sold for slaughter in the autumn when they are in the best condition. Although the reindeer farmers earn income from the meat, it's not enough to support a family, making it necessary for the wives and partners of herders to have off-farm employment.



**TRADITIONAL:** The Seifert's reindeer farm host in traditional Sámi clothing.



**SNOW GRAZING:** Reindeer sniff out and dig through snow to forage on grass and moss.

# To scan or not to scan?

Nathan Broerse

I'm writing from the green North Canterbury, where we are enjoying our first decent autumn in several years. We have started scanning hinds with some really good preliminary results, but I'm aware that's not the case in other parts of the country. Pregnancy scanning is one of the most significant animal health costs of the hind herd, and the decision to do so must be weighed against the production gains and benefits from the information obtained.

Deer are naturally highly fertile. Scanning rates of over 95 percent for MA hinds and 90 percent for yearling hinds should be expected. With the industry average sitting below these figures, there is an economic advantage to both identifying empty hinds and investigating why they were empty in the first place.

## Scanning brings several benefits:

1. Identifying dry hinds – knowing early which hinds aren't pregnant allows them to be culled, freeing up feed they would otherwise have eaten over the winter and spring while generating cash flow from processing.
2. Identifying late calving hinds – management decisions can be made for scanned late calving hinds, such as culling to reduce the spread of calving or drafting into a separate mob for better feed allocation.
3. Identifying poor BCS – comparative BCS should be performed at scanning, with low BCS hinds identified and preferentially fed. In tight feed years this also allows for the more efficient allocation of winter feed for the rest of the herd.
4. Feed planning – body condition scoring and/or identifying late calvers will allow the ability to manage feed supply/demand curves, and for early feeding decisions to be made. In a tough autumn, a higher dry rate can be expected, as well as a larger

proportion of low BCS hinds. Identifying these animals means they can be separated and higher energy feed allocated to them.

5. Stag performance – on farms where single sire mating is practiced, individual stag mating performance can be measured and any issues addressed.



If only a couple of dry hinds have been identified after scanning the first one hundred, let the rest go knowing that there is a low number of dries in the herd.

Scanning nowadays is faster, easier and there are less injuries due to the improved temperament of farmed deer (even since I graduated) and improved ultrasound equipment. Also, pen scanning half a dozen or so hinds at once is now standard practice and much less laborious than crushing each one. So, if you haven't done so already, consult your vet or scanner to organise scanning this month. ■

*Nathan Broerse is a vet from Kaiapoi Farm Veterinary Services*

## 2025 MSD/Allflex Deer Industry Photo Competition

Highly commended



Laura Waller - Round 1



Leora Werner - Hinds and fawns taking off across a paddock into the stormy clouds

# Venison ragout with berries

Graham Brown, DINZ Executive Chef



## Ingredients

500 g venison (diced in 1cm cubes)

1 tsp paprika

½ tsp dried thyme or 1 tsp fresh thyme

Salt and black pepper

100 ml vegetable oil

½ cup finely diced carrot, leek and celery

2 cloves crushed garlic

1 rasher of bacon (finely sliced)

100 ml red wine

½ tsp vinegar (red wine or balsamic)

1 tbsp tomato paste

1 tsp Dijon mustard

Zest of ½ lemon

70 g cranberries

100 ml meat stock

1 tbsp cornflour (mixed into a smidge of water)

100 ml crème fraîche

4  
SERVES

## Method

1. Spice the venison with paprika, thyme and pepper. Fry it in hot oil until well coloured and season with salt.
2. Add the diced vegetables, the garlic and the bacon, then sauté until the vegetables are soft.
3. Add the red wine, then add and mix in the vinegar, tomato paste, mustard and the lemon zest before adding the cranberries.
4. Combine with the meat stock, and let it simmer on a low heat for about an hour.
5. When the venison is tender, add the cornflour, heat it up gently, and season with salt and pepper.
6. Top the ragout with crème fraîche.

## To serve

Can be served with either sautéed potatoes or a broad ribbon pasta like pappardelle. ■

## 2025 MSD/Allflex Deer Industry Photo Competition

Highly commended



Ilka Seebeck - 517



Angela McIntyre - Next generation



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