

Deer Industry News

NZ Deer Supreme meets Next Generation

ALIGNED THINKING

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THE GREAT INDOORS

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POSITIVE OUTLOOK

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Deer Industry News

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DEER FARMERS' ASSOCIATION

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Quality assurance and traceability: Strengthening our future

The year ahead will bring several important changes across the deer industry. These changes are focused on strengthening the systems that protect our reputation, market access, and the long-term value of New Zealand farmed venison and velvet.

Global customers continue to demand greater assurance around traceability, animal welfare, food safety, and product integrity. To remain a trusted supplier of premium products, our systems must keep pace.

One of the key areas of change this season is to VelTrak and the Velvet Status Declaration (VSD) system. Updates to the VelTrak Terms of Use and refinements to VSD requirements are being introduced to improve data accuracy and strengthen market assurance.

For farmers, the most visible changes will include mandatory recording of velvet weights, clearer separation of bulk velvet and whole-stick velvet within VSD documentation, and continued emphasis on recording velvet movements promptly and accurately.

While some may see these changes as additional administration, good information strengthens traceability and helps the industry meet increasingly demanding market requirements.

The industry will also see new leadership at the National Velvetting Standards Body (NVSB). We acknowledge and thank Ian Scott for his long-standing contribution and welcome Andrew Scurr as the new Chair.

The NVSB's focus remains unchanged: maintaining high standards of animal welfare, credible assurance systems, and practical support for farmers.

Another area requiring attention are Animal Status Declarations (ASDs). ASDs are an important part of food safety, risk management, and market access.

Accurate completion of ASDs, supported by good farm records, helps protect the reputation of New Zealand farmed venison and supports customer confidence throughout the supply chain.

The same principle applies to NAIT compliance. Farmers should ensure replacement tags are applied and registered correctly and avoid pre-registering tags before they are fitted to animals.

Transport quality assurance will also receive increased attention this year. DINZ will undertake an industry-wide review of deer transport crates and introduce uniquely identified DINZ tags for audited crates that meet industry standards.

The objective is straightforward: ensuring transport infrastructure remains fit for purpose and supports good animal welfare outcomes.

The common thread across these initiatives is demonstrating the standards that underpin New Zealand deer farming. Whether it is VelTrak, VSD documentation, NVSB oversight, ASDs, NAIT compliance, or transport quality assurance, each plays a role in protecting our reputation and supporting market access.

Over the coming months, farmers and industry stakeholders can expect more detailed communications on these changes. I encourage everyone to engage with that information and understand what is required.

The direction is clear. Stronger systems, better information, and greater accountability are increasingly expected by customers and regulators. By embracing these improvements, we are protecting the future of our industry and creating long-term value for New Zealand deer farmers. ■

By Merryn Pugh, DINZ Quality Assurance Manager

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Matchmaker hunting app



Hunttable.com is a new Airbnb-type app connecting responsible hunters with rural landowners. Hunttable's mission is to make hunting access simple, safe, and a mutually beneficial activity, giving landowners the opportunity to protect their land and earn income, while giving responsible hunters fair access to quality hunting territory. Landowners host hunters through Hunttable, creating a profile and listing their property with photos, boundaries, and hunting details. They set the rules, pricing, the availability of the land, and any accommodation, and approve bookings from verified licensed hunters. It's free for landowners to list, and there are no subscription charges or hidden costs. Hunttable take care of all the administration and earn a 17.5% percent service fee from confirmed bookings. Every hunter must verify their identity and hunting license before accessing the Hunttable platform. Find out more: www.hunttable.co.nz/home

From dairy to deer



Wintec Level 4 Rural Animal Healthcare Assistant students attended this year's Next Generation event. The one-year course is dairy-based, course tutor Rachael Robertson said, and Next Generation gave the students a great introduction to the deer industry. "We're keen to broaden their horizons beyond dairy to beef, lamb and deer, and this has been a great opportunity," she said.

Supreme status for co-product business



NZ Deer Supreme (NZDS) might be situated in the industrial back streets of Rotorua, but it holds a prominent place in New Zealand's co-product industry. Proof of its high-ranking status is a photo board featuring visits from several dignitaries, including one with NZDS founder and principal Dr Kin with Sir John Key. When the Next Generation crowd called for a visit, Dr Kin explained that his business, established in 1992, dried, powdered and encapsulated a range of deer co-products for contract orders and for their own branded products. Deer are a prized medicinal animal in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), he said, and offered a treasure trove of nose-to-tail remedies. After a walk around NZDS's retail outlet, Next Generation attendees each received a complimentary tube of deer oil skin balm.

Wild deer control funding



A \$9.7 million funding boost from the International Visitor Levy (IVL) will help put more wild deer in the firing line. Federated Farmers welcomed the August announcement highlighting the "billions of dollars" of damage and costs wild deer and feral goats have incurred on private and conservation land throughout the country. A recent Feds' survey estimates pests are costing farmers around \$466 million a year through direct control costs and lost production.

Two-thirds of farmers now report pest numbers have increased over the past five years, up from around half in 2024.

Farmers are now spending an average \$6.18 per hectare each year on pest control, up around 13% in two years.

The survey also shows farmers are eight times more likely to identify forestry or Crown land than another farm as the neighbouring land use making pest control difficult.

Feds concludes that the IVL funding announcement is a great start, but a more strategic and coordinated approach is needed, and they're calling for a nationally coordinated pest management strategy.

Read more about the wild deer issue on pages 12-15.

Haldon Station NZ's first fast-track solar farm

Haldon Station is the base for the first solar farm in New Zealand to be granted fast-track approval. Construction is expected to start in the next year and take about 12–18 months. The development will comprise 360,000 solar panels mounted on steel frames over 320 ha of sparsely vegetated land, bounded on the north side by Haldon's centre-pivot area. The development is expected to generate 370 GWh of renewable energy annually, enough to power around 45,000 households. The move into solar was a well-considered decision, Haldon Station manager and DINZ Chair Paddy Boyd says.

“First up, it will allow us to power our pivot irrigators and move away from high fossil fuel use, while at the same time diversify some of our business, considering environmental and financial sustainability. The cost of maintaining land in the Mackenzie Basin is extremely high, and as custodians, we have to look to diversify where we can to continue to do what we do.”

According to a recent Farmers Weekly story, there's about 350 ha of solar farms across NZ, with an estimated 2000 ha of additional land consented for expansion. A further 10,000 ha of solar farms is being considered by solar companies.

Farm accidents down but could do better



ACC farm injury claims have fallen, but there's still room for improvement. Farm-related claims have reduced from more than 25,000 in 2020 to 17,322 last year – a result, Safer Farms says, that has come from thousands of small, practical safety decisions by farmers, growers, contractors, and rural teams. Safer Farms ambassador Lindy Nelson – also a presenter at this year's NZDFA Branch Chairs Meeting – says farmers deserve real credit for this progress. “They are the ones making the calls day to day, slowing down when the weather changes, setting jobs up properly, talking things through, and finding practical fixes that work in the real world. That is why the drop in claims is encouraging.” But no one in rural New Zealand will see it as job done, she says. “Too many farming families still know someone who has been hurt or worse... Safer farms are better farms. They are more productive and more resilient through tough times. Most importantly, they help make sure everyone gets home safe at the end of the day.”

Changes at Fairlight

The Fairlight Foundation has a new Executive Director, Kristi Wright, who takes over from inaugural ED Laura Koot. The foundation's mission is to advance women in agriculture through a year-long practical programme for graduate women aged 21 and over at Fairlight Station in northern Southland. The hands-on experience includes deer, which have been a favourite with several of the interns. This year's Next Generation lineup included a Fairlight Foundation graduate, Tegan Butler, who now works at Melior Genetics.



Future food trends put venison on the menu

The forces shaping future food demand are good news for venison. Rabobank's recent report *Succession 2050* gives a view of what 2050 could look like based on emerging trends and influences. Among these are: 1) A 'silver tsunami' of people aged over 50, representing 34% of global GDP but accounting for 49% of food and beverage spending. By 2050, that same cohort will represent 39% of global GDP, worth US\$118 trillion; 2) An increase in people wanting smaller portions of nutrient-dense foods rich in protein, with functional benefits and proof of low emissions and positive environmental outcomes; and 3) An increase in the global population, with an extra two million more people walking on the planet between now and 2050, most in developing countries where there is much potential for income growth. For more good news about venison, see page 16 to read about US retail developments led by Greenstone Meats, a major importer and distributor of NZ farmed venison. ■



WANTED

DEER FARM LABOURER/MANAGER IN NORTH WAIKATO

We are looking for an experienced deer handler, preferably with a velvet drug removal licence, or an experienced deer stockman not yet licenced.

An opportunity exists to take charge of a 500 stag velvetting unit, and occasionally co-work with the owner on a separate stud operation. A near new and warm three bedroom home is available.



Reliable and dependable applicants with a top work ethic should call Joe on 027 472 7436

Young one

After years of trying, long-serving NZDFA Bay of Plenty Branch Chair Liz Love has secured a successor in Mat Krs. He's the 'young one' (34) in the branch of about 35 members. Mat juggles deer farming with contracting, a firewood business, a building business, and a young family.

How and when did you take on the Branch Chair role?

Liz asked me to be Chair. Liz is backing and supporting me in the role, and she deserves the credit for the behind-the-scenes work emails being sent. I run the meetings and do the talking, and she does the hard yards! I get to go to Wellington and ask the hard questions when necessary because I'm passionate about farming deer and will be around for a few years to come.

Where do you live and with whom?

My family, Emma (wife), Harvey (4) and Charlotte (4 months) live in Paradise Valley, which is about 15 minutes west of Rotorua.

When did you become involved with deer farming?

My introduction to deer was at six-years-old when my family bought a Whanganui farm running sheep, cattle and deer. I've been fascinated and hooked on deer ever since.

Where and what do you farm?

I run 140 velvet stags and 90 Wiltshire breeding ewes on 110 ha (70 ha effective). In 2017, I purchased 80 ha with financial backing from family. Only months later, the council put in heavy restrictions, and we were limited to 55 breeding cows on 80 ha. Farming this way was not financially viable so I decided diversification was the only way we would be able to keep farming. In 2019, we purchased the 30-ha farm next door off John Newton; we then subdivided and sold the house to keep the debt levels as low as possible. John sold the farm with 30 in-fawn hinds to get us started, and one of the hinds was 26-years-old, which was only four years younger than me! I have slowly grown my herd year-on-year to 140 velvetting stags

What farm improvements have you made?

Lots! I've re-fenced 40 ha from sheep to deer fence, replaced 20 ha of deer fence, filled and reshaped the farm, plus cultivated paddocks to try my own deer pasture seed mixes, created with the help of Farmlands and Verdi. I've refurbished and revamped the shed to make it suitable for velvetting and to meet the velvetting removal regulations.

To whom or where do you go for deer farming advice?

The branch as a whole has given me a lot of help and good advice, and I wouldn't be where I am today if it wasn't for Don and Liz Love. I owe them a lot.

What are your deer breeding priorities?

I'm focused on deer which produce high-quality traditional velvet and have a calm temperament, good feet, and are worm resistant. I buy 20 to 40 a year, mostly from Don Love. I'm a repeat customer of Don's because he has the ideal stags for me and my lifestyle. I do all of the velvetting, so I need easy-to-handle animals which fit

around my contracting business. I cut just over one tonne of velvet and want to increase this.

How did the most recent velvet season go?

I was hopeful it was going to be a better season than it was. I only got a \$56/kg average, and as a result sold 20 older stags to make up for the loss of income. However, I'm committed to velvet and will keep pushing ahead. Fingers crossed the velvet sales turn around this season.

What are your deer farming goals?

I want to develop a breeding and velvet operation, but to do this I'll need another farm, and the only way to get that will be from more contracting and firewood sales. In the meantime, I'd like to take on more workers for my contracting business. The full-on contracting season clashes with velvetting, and if I have more contracting staff, I'll be able to concentrate more on the velvet and breeding.

What are your other business interests?

Contracting and digger work, selling firewood, and building if we are quiet as I'm a qualified builder. I do contract baling and seeding from mid-September until March. I have two full-time employees plus my wife Emma, who will drive a combi round baler or tractor when we are busy, which has been a big cost saver.

What do you enjoy beyond farming and work commitments?

We have a boat with accommodation for the family that we take out on Lake Rotoiti for two to three days at a time. It's a great escape from the phone and work, and we can access free hot pools. ■



A true quality administrator

Long-serving DINZ employee Pam MacLeman was a Quality Administrator in every sense.

There are some people within an organisation whose contribution extends far beyond their job description. They're the steady hand behind the scenes, the trusted voice at the end of the phone, and the person everyone turns to when they need help. For DINZ, that person was Pam MacLeman, who after 20 years of dedicated service has called time on her Quality Systems Administrator role.

It's been an all-things-to-all-people job, providing administrative support across the industry's quality assurance programmes, including the National Velvet Standards Body (NVS), DeerQA Transport, Venison Processing Quality Assurance, and On-Farm Quality Assurance programmes.

But she has been so much more than an administrator, former manager John Tacon says.

"Pam has been the administrative backbone of the industry's quality assurance programmes," he says.

"She's been the reassuring voice on the telephone, the friendly email that always arrived with the right answer, and the person who could solve problems that often seemed impossible to everyone else."

While the QA programmes have evolved and expanded over the years, Pam's commitment and unwavering support remained constant throughout, ensuring the administration was run smoothly and efficiently, he said.

On stepping into the position in July 2006, Pam made it her mission to take ownership of the role.

"I was in a service role, and I wanted to make the admin side as easy as possible for people. I made the job my own through building relationships with a lot of people," Pam says.

She's made numerous friends across the industry, initially through many phone conversations and then sometimes in person at industry conferences.

While the building of many longstanding relationships has been a highlight, the changes to QA systems over the years created challenges. The most notable example was the 2017 introduction of the Regulated Control System (RCS) for velvet, a framework to ensure harvested velvet meets standards across hygiene, cold chain management, and traceability.

Off the back of the RCS came electronic, web-based velvet traceability system VelTrak – which initially was another big and head-numbing system. Both were huge and time-consuming developments for Pam, who says she's never enjoyed the technical and computer-based side of the role. But the fact she persisted with the changes and new systems reflects her loyalty and work ethic, John says.



DEDICATED: Pam's contribution to the deer industry has extended far beyond her job description.

"Her commitment has provided invaluable continuity to the industry's quality assurance systems and has helped maintain the confidence of farmers, veterinarians, processors, and programme participants alike."

For John's successor Merryn Pugh, Pam was welcoming and supportive as she settled into her role at DINZ.

"Her wealth of knowledge and deep understanding of our systems, farmers, veterinarians, transport operators, meat processors and exporters were invaluable in helping me understand the landscape and come to terms with the complexities of the industry," Merryn says.

"Her legacy will endure for years to come through the people she has supported, the systems she has strengthened, and the relationships she has built."

Looking back on her time with DINZ, Pam says the lasting impression is the people.

"I've really enjoyed the people I've worked with, which has made for a friendly environment. Although we all have specific roles, everyone has worked together as a team and helped out where needed," she says.

"There's been a real family atmosphere over the years, and now there's a new generation coming through, which bodes well for the future."

She'll miss the daily dealings with the DINZ team and constant contact with the wider industry.

"It's been very humbling, receiving well wishes for my retirement from many of those I've interacted with over the years."

However, she will enjoy having more free time for family and settling into a new home on the Kapiti Coast, north of Wellington. Next year, she and husband Brian are looking forward to tackling the Camino de Santiago, a walking trail traversing Portugal and Spain. ■



MILESTONE MARKED: Pam's 20-years employment at DINZ was celebrated with the four chief executives she has worked with: Rhys Griffiths, Dan Coup, Mark O'Connor and Innes Moffat.

Young Deer Farmer Competition returns

The South Canterbury North Otago (SCNO) DFA branch is bringing the Young Deer Farmer Competition back for a second time, with the event set for 9 October 2026.

The inaugural competition, held in 2024 and designed as a biennial event, was both a New Zealand and world-first. Held at Peel Forest Estate, the competition attracted 23 contestants aged 18 to 25-years-old, along with a few non-competitive high school students. They were tested across a written quiz, animal weighing, velvet grading, fencing, and a range of other practical activities designed to gauge farming aptitude. For many, it was their first time trying skills such as measuring hard antler – all part of a day that SCNO Branch Chair Mark Tapley says was as much about connection as competition.

"It was a great day and a huge success, in terms of what we were trying to achieve."

He says a post-event highlight was branch members joining contestants for a barbeque, with "all these young folk picking the brains of those who've been doing it for years."

This year, with modules reviewed and/or revamped, organisers are looking forward to welcoming a strong field of competitors. The event will also welcome several students from Geraldine High School's Primary Industry Academy, giving them a first-hand look at the skills and pathways available in deer farming. The competition, run with support from DINZ, will conclude with the announcement of the winner, but prizes will be presented at the SCNO velvet competition.

Generous prizes from the SCNO DFA Trust, along with module awards and prizes from DINZ and other sponsors, are on offer. But as the last event proved, the real prize is often the camaraderie – and the chance for the next generation of deer farmers to learn from those who've spent a lifetime in the industry. ■



WINNING EFFORT: Lead organisers of the 2024 Young Deer Farmer Competition, Danette McKeown and Mark Tapley with winner Eddie Millichamp (centre).

High-quality velvet focus

At Forest Road Farm, our focus has always been on breeding high-quality velvet with clean, tidy characteristics and well-formed, round tops.

We pride ourselves on selecting only the best Main Sires—both purchased and homebred—based on these market-driven attributes. However, our approach goes beyond the aesthetics of velvet. We place significant emphasis on breeding for larger body size, strong constitution, and excellent temperament, ensuring that our herd is well-equipped for long-term performance.

While the previous few years have created market conditions that have been challenging, we remain steadfast in our commitment to shaping the future of the velvet industry. We believe that genetics is not a one-year solution—it's about making strategic breeding decisions today that will define the herd we need in the next five to 10 years. By focusing on the long-term potential of our genetics, we aim to drive the industry forward.

The quality of the velvet we produce is proving increasingly important! We don't want to shrink our way to success as an industry, but we have to focus on the type of velvet genetics that are going to stand the test of time and deliver what the market desires. The perfectly formed velvet with great tyne placement, no extras and nice round tops are always going to command a premium in the market. We as breeders have the responsibility to shape what this looks like as we move forward.

We are also pleased to offer data-driven insights through our BV (Breeding Value) evaluations for both velvet and venison production. These metrics have become a valuable tool in refining our breeding decisions, and we're confident that the BV data supports the direction we've been taking.

At Forest Road Farm we have decades of deer production data, so it was a simple job to get that uploaded into Deer Select and have generations of deer data analysed. The amount of back-data we provided ensured strong accuracy in the results and can be relied on to help inform our breeding decisions and yours as well.

These numbers reflect an animal's performance within our herd, and the strength of this data will increase as we build linkages with other studs and commercial herds. This allows Deer Select to compare the performance of genetics in different environments.

This reinforces our commitment to breeding the best genetics for both present and future market needs. ■

Editorial supplied by Forest Road Farm.



FOREST ROAD FARM

— NZ RED DEER —



Odin
9.85kg @ 4yr



Harrigan
10.20kg @ 5yr



Valhalla
10.80kg @ 4yr

Current Velvet Sires



Laphroaig
9.45kg @ 3yr



Creed
7.50kg SAP @ 3yr



Norse
5.00kg @ 2yr

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Website: www.forestroadfarm.co.nz**

Vietnam access a foot in the door

Cameron Frecklington, DINZ Communications Manager

Vietnam is a country on the move. Home to more than 100 million people, it has undergone a remarkable economic and social transformation over the past three decades. The share of the population living in urban areas has more than doubled since 1990, with Hanoi in the north and Ho Chi Minh City in the south emerging as dynamic economic centres. By 2030, more than half of Vietnam's population is expected to live in urban areas.

Now New Zealand's deer industry has a foot in the door. Vietnam has granted market access for New Zealand farmed venison and deer velvet, including frozen and dried velvet, creating a potentially valuable new export destination in Southeast Asia. The agreement was announced during the mid-August State visit of Vietnamese President To Lam and marks another step in the growing relationship between the two countries.

For velvet in particular, Vietnam holds obvious appeal. Consumers are already familiar with traditional health products and share some of the cultural influences with neighbouring China. Yet while the long-term potential is easy to see, DINZ Chief Executive Rhys Griffiths says expectations should be measured in the early stages.

"Market access gets you a seat at the table, but market development is where the real work begins," Rhys says.

"Building demand and strong commercial relationships will take time, but we're confident there's genuine appetite for New Zealand deer products. We saw that firsthand during our 2025 visit to Vietnam, and the speed at which this agreement came together only reinforces that optimism."

During a market visit in 2025, a DINZ representative met with importers, distributors, and health product companies to better understand consumer preferences and market dynamics. While Vietnam remains a relatively small market compared with China and is less established than South Korea, its rapid economic growth, expanding middle class, and increasing interest in premium food and health products were impossible to ignore.

For venison, the opportunity may lie in the country's developing hospitality sector. Rising incomes, urbanisation and a growing appetite for international cuisine are creating demand for premium protein options. New Zealand venison is unlikely to become a mainstream product overnight, but it could find a niche among high-end restaurants, hotels and consumers seeking something different.

Market access gets you a seat at the table, but market development is where the real work begins.

Rhys Griffiths

Velvet, meanwhile, enters a market that already has familiarity with traditional health and wellness products. That does not mean success is guaranteed. Consumers have choices, local production exists, and competition from other imported products – such as our partners in South Korea, who already have a roadmap for such a market – will be strong. However, New Zealand's reputation for quality, traceability and food safety provides a solid foundation on which to build.

"We're realistic about the time it takes to develop a new market, but having access to Vietnam is important from day one," DINZ Markets Manager Terry Meikle says.

"The immediate opportunity is to begin establishing relationships, understanding distribution channels, and identifying where



Samples purchased at various pharmacies in Ho Chi Minh City during a DINZ market visit in late 2025 show a familiarity with deer velvet.

New Zealand products can add value. At the same time, every additional market gives exporters and growers more options and helps reinforce the value of high-quality New Zealand velvet."

For deer farmers back home, the announcement is another reminder that market development work often starts years before commercial returns are realised. The visit to Vietnam, the engagement by government officials, and the negotiations leading to market access have all laid foundations that can now be built upon by exporters and industry participants.

Every additional market gives exporters and growers more options and helps reinforce the value of high-quality New Zealand velvet.

Terry Meikle

Whether Vietnam ultimately becomes a major market for venison, velvet, or both remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that a country of more than 100 million people, with a fast-growing economy and an increasing appetite for premium products, is a market worth paying attention to.

And for New Zealand's deer industry, gaining that seat at the table is an important first step. ■



VIETNAM

	Population	103.5 million
	GDP growth forecast	7.5%
	Unemployment	2.2%
	Food Inflation	4.6%
	Retail sales growth	14.5%

Strong economic growth, rising consumer demand and low unemployment continue to support Vietnam's long-term market potential. Enhanced agricultural cooperation between New Zealand and Vietnam may create opportunities for premium product exports as the country's consumer market expands.

Vietnam National Statistics Office Sources, International Monetary Fund, Trading Economics

From DINZ's recent *State of the Industry: Mid-Year Update*

The breeding hind sets the start line, but you pick the finish.

Last season Peel Forest Estate's 904 commercial mixed-sex yearlings averaged 77.4 kg on the hooks.

They were progeny of B11 terminal sires over commercial Forrester hinds, run on our hill country, killed from late January through to the end of March.

Average carcass weight of mixed-sex weaners:
Stags: 83.06 kg (472 head) | Hinds: 71.31 kg (432 head)
Overall average 77.44kg

That overall result is due to the Forrester hinds that reared them. They conceive early, milk well, stay sound on hill country, and produce a vigorous fawn with headstart growth and a weight advantage that no terminal sire can buy back later.

That growth advantage can be managed for two possible markets: growing and supplying weaners for the early October market or carrying them through to the backend of the season to further capitalise on the headstart weight advantage.

That one hind can provide two possible exit markets.

"You're not buying the stag. You're buying the daughters he leaves behind."

The headstart advantage is what the Forrester breeding programme is all about, turning out sires that leave daughters with high fertility and early conception attributes, backed up with the right breeding value numbers for constitution, temperament and soundness, growth, John's resilience, and high CARLA parasite resistance.

Every one of our Forrester sires has to earn a place in our herd before it gets a lot number.

Last season, 86 percent of the Forrester sires went to repeat buyers, one of whom was back for the eleventh consecutive sale last year. This is not our claim about genetics. It's theirs.

Forresters were bred for meat first, and the maternal traits were built on top of that, never instead of it. So, if running a separate terminal mob does not stack up for you, put a Forrester over the whole herd, keep the best daughters, and kill the rest.

When selecting a maternal sire, remember what it is you're buying: it's not the stag, it's his daughters. Those hinds and the attributes they bring with them – conception date, fawning spread, longevity – are what underpins and boosts herd productivity over the following decade. ■

Editorial supplied by Peel Forest Estate.

Forrester Sire Auction, Friday 11th December | For catalogue and paddock inspections contact: mark@pfe.nz

Cost of wild deer in Hawke's Bay

Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News Editor

Wild deer in Hawke's Bay are chewing their way through an estimated \$10,000 of farmland pasture a year. That's one of the alarming findings in a recent report; another is the revelation that the wild deer problem may be significantly worse than landowners realise.

"There is good evidence from drone and heli-thermal imaging that many landowners could have five to six times more deer than they think," report author and agri economist Peter MacIntyre says.

"Once deer numbers grow from 50 to 100 or more, the economic damage gets serious, more so if they're browsing your property full time."

He estimated that the average red hind chomped its way through the same dry matter annually as two stock units or 40 percent of a cattle beast. Furthermore, 100 deer sourcing half of their feed from a farm could eat through \$10,000 of pasture a year, which over 10 years accumulated to \$100,000 in lost earnings.

The purpose of the report was to quantify the avoidable losses caused by wild deer, assess the cost of fencing to exclude them, and recommend a management and control system that would provide a net benefit to landowners.

The report, based on interviews with 14 landowners and desktop sources, also highlighted the decimation by wild deer of forage crops, new native bush plantings, and young plantation forestry. The report also mentioned the serious biosecurity risk they posed in spreading bovine Tuberculosis.

Control options

The report identified exclusion fencing and eradication through commercial hunting as the most effective control and management options. But they were also expensive, with a kilometre of fencing ranging from \$18,000 to \$40,000 per kilometre.

"Interviews underlined that difficult terrain makes deer fencing challenging. The costs of new deer fencing is high, but adapting existing fences can be a lot more cost effective," Peter said.

He recommended as the best long-term solution for wild deer control a collective action approach, using electric fencing, recreational hunting and professional venison recovery.

Electric fencing added to permanent fencing worked out at about \$8000 kilometre, and if done by a group of farmers or a catchment group, could be a cost-effective option, Peter said.

He used the example of one landowner who had put twin electric wires on an existing fence – one 300 mm above the fence and the other 300 mm out from the fence, for a cost of around \$8,000 per kilometre. The farmer said he had been lucky to have cooperative neighbours who were a mix of foresters and farmers.

"If your paddock is providing 100 deer half of their feed, and fencing them out costs you \$35,000 a kilometre, it's only economic to fence a few kilometres. But if a lower cost electric fencing option was effective at \$8000 per kilometre, it would be economic to fence

larger areas of seven to eleven kilometres," he said.



FENCING CHALLENGE: Exclusion fencing on difficult terrain is expensive, ranging from \$18,000 to \$40,000 per kilometre.

"There is good evidence from drone and heli-thermal imaging that many landowners could have five to six times more deer than they think."

Peter MacIntyre

He emphasised that fencing – whatever the form – is not 100 percent effective. But break-ins and damage from wild deer could be minimised if fences were maintained and repaired promptly, then backed up with shooting.

Collective action

Interviewees agreed that collective action was needed for successful, ongoing management of wild deer. They also agreed that implementing it was easier said than done when some landowners treated wild deer as a hunting resource and/or income generating asset.

A first step toward collective action could involve a catchment group or neighbouring farmers collaborating, coordinating, and funding the counting, fencing, and control of deer in a defined region. It would be a 'proof of concept' project driven and funded by farmers.

Alternatively, regional councils had statutory powers under the Biosecurity Act to monitor deer numbers, and if landowners breached defined limits, councils could enforce landowners to take control action.

"Drones or helicopters could verify control effectiveness using thermal cameras," Peter said.

“Rules would need to be implemented to effectively manage wild deer, with consideration given to landowners who want to control numbers while maintaining a population to allow trapping and hunting.”

However, a regional council-driven model was a ‘stick’ rather than ‘carrot’ approach that could bring pushback rather than buy in from landowners, he said.

A national management plan for the control of introduced wild animals, including deer, is under development, but progress is frustratingly slow. The plan is being developed by the Wild Animals Management National Coordination Group (see Deer Industry News, Issue 128), of which DINZ is a member. Stakeholder feedback is being sought through a targeted engagement process,” DOC Wild Animals Manager Mike Perry said following a meeting in early September. “DOC and MPI will consider the feedback received and continue developing the framework, with the current expectation that an initial framework will be ready in 2027. ■



EATING UP RETURNS: A wild red hind eats the equivalent of two stock units or 40 percent of a cattle beast.

HOSI status for wapiti, sika herds

Fiordland wapiti have become New Zealand’s first Herd of Special Interest (HOSI). The move, announced on 13 July, paves the way for the game animals to be sustainably managed for their hunting values, while improving important conservation outcomes, Minister James Meager said. The HOSI designation, which falls under the Game Animal Council Act 2013, was proposed by the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation. The day following the wapiti announcement, the Central North Island sika herd was also given HOSI status.

While hunting advocates have welcomed the move, environmentalists have warned about the potential dangers. In public consultation last year, Forest & Bird warned that the introduction of HOSI for pest species such as deer, goats and pigs on public conservation land set a dangerous precedent that could undermine the very purpose of such areas. “Even in low numbers, they cause incredible damage to our native ecosystems by eating and trampling native plants and outcompeting native fauna for food,” F&B’s Nicky Snoyink said. “What New Zealand needs is a nationally coordinated action plan across all land tenures to control introduced invasive pests.”

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US retail appetite for NZ venison grows

Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News Editor

The opportunity for New Zealand farmed venison is real. The limiting factor is supply.

Those are two of the big messages from Greenstone Meats Vice President U.S. Sales, Brian Holland.

“Making sure we have supply is the big one. If we don’t, it puts our retail programme at risk,” he says.

Greenstone volume sales of farmed venison have grown about 30 percent year-on-year, most of the increase due to increased retail demand.

Retail growth was driven by customers preference for leaner, nutrient-dense, high-quality protein. The launch of GLP-1 weight loss medications has accelerated the need for high-protein meal solutions in the United States, and New Zealand farmed venison has those exact credentials, giving retailers the confidence to try it.

Research by Greenstone Meats has revealed that grass-fed, no hormones, and no antibiotics are important considerations for Four Seasons venison customers.

North American Retail Accelerator (NARA) has played a crucial role in building retail momentum.

“It’s helped in educating retailers, building customer awareness, and developing the venison category, which individual suppliers would be unable to do.”

Specific Greenstone developments and successes over the last two years include the launch of venison in more than 200 Giant Company stores; a 100 percent volume growth year-on-year with Albertsons, a major North American supermarket chain; and the introduction of venison medallions. Brian adds that Greenstone’s venison category is outperforming the industry volume growth rate of 30 percent.

NARA has also created industry alignment of NZ venison suppliers.

“A coordinated New Zealand approach I think benefits your industry as a whole, both farmers and processors.”

The U.S. retail and NZ venison relationship has grown off the one-pound brick of ground venison. Ground meat – beef, chicken, turkey, pork – is a go-to and familiar product for many home cooks. They feel comfortable on how to prepare it, so it was a logical “foot in the door.”

NARA has delivered support by building awareness through several marketing programmes. These include digital campaigns on platforms such as Instagram, sharing venison recipes, and identifying where to buy product.

Greenstone has also increased venison visibility at major industry events such as the Fancy Food Show and the Annual Meat

Conference. Collectively these initiatives were building credibility for the product and the New Zealand brand.

“The country of origin, New Zealand, has helped establish immediate credibility with our customers. They view your farmers and their production systems as regenerative and sustainable. They also correlate New Zealand with high standards of animal welfare and environmental stewardship, and that instantly lends credibility to our Greenstone [venison] brand, Four Seasons.”

Retail customers now view venison as an everyday protein rather than a treat, because it was satisfying their demand for a nutrient-dense and high-protein product to fit with active lifestyles and modern eating habits.

Meat market credentials

Brian Holland has an excellent understanding of the North American red meat industry, having worked for two of the dominant beef businesses, Cargill and JBS, in roles covering retail sales, production scheduling, and pricing. He joined Greenstone four years ago because of its growth ambitions.

Greenstone is a North American supplier of beef, lamb and venison, owned in a cooperative structure by Alliance Group, Silver Fern Farms and Anzco Foods. Australian lamb processor WAMMCO is also a shareholder.

Venison supplied to Greenstone arrives in primal cut form and is processed at two facilities in the United States (New Jersey and Los Angeles), and a third in Toronto, Canada. The venison is packaged and sold under the Four Seasons brand.

Greenstone oversees the delivery of venison product to over 800 business points for further distribution to food service companies and retailers.

Research by Greenstone on what attributes are important to customers who buy Four Seasons venison has revealed that grass-fed, no hormones, and no antibiotics are the three big considerations.

“When you look at that research data, New Zealand venison aligns very well with consumer sentiments and healthy proteins. That’s important and something you need to keep promoting.”



MEAT MAN: Greenstone Meats Vice President U.S. Sales Brian Holland.

Farmed venison sits in the premium price category, alongside lean beef and lamb, but was often the preferred choice.

“The difference is that venison, when compared to conventional domestic beef, offers greater value because of its attributes. It’s grass-fed and has nutritional and sustainability attributes.

“I think [farmed venison’s] premium position creates an opportunity for sustainable growth throughout the supply chain.”

For Greenstone, further retail developments include investigation into launching a private label for venison to Albertsons, which would give “instant access” to 2500 stores.

Greenstone is also looking to expand the range of leg and shoulder cuts to improve utilisation.

Asked how our farmed venison industry could further leverage off the retail inroads into North America, Brian suggests more “customer-facing” research.

“There’s a big push at retail for fact-based selling. I think research providing evidence that venison is a high-nutrient and high-protein food that keeps you full for longer is what you should focus on. Communicating the strengths of New Zealand farmed venison could be very powerful in supporting category growth.”

He commends the industry on the significant progress made, especially through programmes like NARA, which has helped open doors that didn’t exist a few years ago.

“I think continuing to focus on quality, consistency, animal welfare, genetics, and telling the New Zealand, grass-fed venison story is going to be important in the growth of the category. That’s the message I would like to pass on to New Zealand farmers.” ■



Venison as medicine

DINZ has commissioned research to validate the high nutrient and protein status of New Zealand farmed venison.

A foundational white paper is underway with U.S.-based nutrition marketing specialists Wild Hive. The project will combine nutrition research, expert dietitian input, industry interviews, and market insights to develop a nutrition narrative and messaging framework for New Zealand farmed venison in the United States, DINZ Markets Manager Terry Meikle says.



FOUNDATIONAL RESEARCH: DINZ foundational research is underway to develop a nutrition narrative and messaging framework for NZ venison in the US, Terry Meikle says.

“The goal is to establish our deer industry as the trusted source of information on farmed venison while identifying how venison can participate in emerging conversations around nutrition, wellness and healthy living,” he explains.

“By combining evidence, consumer insight and compelling storytelling, New Zealand farmed venison will be well positioned to capture value from one of the most significant shifts in U.S. food culture in a generation.”

Brian Holland’s observations of the changing U.S. food landscape are echoed by Terry.

“After decades of nutrition and food policy that favoured affordability, convenience and highly processed foods, there is growing interest in nutrient-dense whole foods and the role diet can play in supporting better health outcomes.”

Influential forces are the ‘Make America Healthy Again’ movement, combined with the widespread adoption of GLP-1 weight management medications, which are accelerating demand towards protein-rich foods that support satiety, muscle maintenance and healthy ageing.

This changing environment presents an exciting opportunity for New Zealand farmed venison, Terry says.

“It’s naturally high in quality protein and rich in key nutrients such as iron, zinc and B vitamins, and aligns strongly with many of the nutrition trends now shaping consumer choices in North America.”

Left: STAR PERFORMER: Greenstone’s venison category is outperforming the industry volume growth rate of 30%.

Hanpure backs NZ velvet for the long haul

Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News Editor

It's good to know that the hard work and dedication New Zealand velvet producers have put in over the past 50-odd years has not gone unnoticed in South Korea.

"The deer velvet produced through your [NZ deer farmers] efforts is helping support the health and wellbeing of many people in Korea," Hanpure Chief Executive Alex Chung says.

"We strongly believe that the future success of the Korean and New Zealand deer velvet industries is interconnected and remain committed to building that future together. We see ourselves not simply as a buyer of New Zealand velvet, but as a long-term partner."



STRONG POSITION: New Zealand velvet has strengthened its position in Korea over recent years, and there is still significant opportunity for future growth, Alex Chung says.

Hanpure is a major player in South Korea's velvet market and a leading supplier of New Zealand velvet to traditional Korean medical (TKM) practitioners. Whole velvet antler is processed at hGMP (herbal Good Manufacturing Practice)-certified facilities and supplied to more than 10,000 TKM clinics in sliced and prepared forms for prescription use. The company also supplies herbal medicine dispensaries, where prescriptions are prepared on behalf of practitioners.

"While we have expanded into herbal medicines, clinical supplies, and medical devices, New Zealand deer velvet remains one of our core businesses and an area in which we continue to invest heavily," Alex says.

"We see our role as not only supplying products but also helping build understanding and trust in New Zealand deer velvet among practitioners and consumers alike."

Alex Chung

Hanpure's point of difference, and selling advantage for New Zealand, is its integrated platform connecting almost every stage of the TKM supply chain.

"Because there are fewer intermediary steps in the supply chain, we can maintain efficiency, quality control, and close engagement with practitioners."

That integrated chain includes Hanpure Mall, one of South Korea's largest online platforms dedicated to TKM practitioners.

"This gives us valuable insight into the needs of practitioners and allows us to communicate directly with the people who prescribe and recommend velvet products."

Animal welfare credentials in the spotlight



A recently released YouTube documentary, 'Rediscovery of Deer Velvet' is a video series produced by Hanpure. The motivating reason for the nine-episode series was to show and explain to the TKM community the valuable legacy that the New Zealand deer farming industry has built over the past 50 years, Alex explains. Another goal was to explain the animal management practices that underpin deer farming systems.

"Animal welfare has become increasingly important to younger consumers and younger TKM practitioners in Korea. New Zealand is recognised for its high animal welfare standards, and we felt it was important that this story be communicated accurately and transparently."

Sharing authentic stories from farmers, researchers, and industry leaders had helped address concerns and misconceptions that some practitioners and patients had, giving them an increased confidence to prescribe and consume New Zealand deer velvet, he says.

The final five episodes, filmed last year and narrated by Alex, included visits to the Whyte family's Edendale Station, the South Canterbury/North Otago DFA velvet competition, PGG Wrightson's velvet processing facilities, and Invermay deer farm.

Response to the videos from the clinical TKM community has been "overwhelmingly positive," Alex says.

"These videos represent a long-term investment in the future. We hope that young practitioners and students entering the profession will come to view New Zealand deer velvet not only as a safe and trusted ingredient, but also as a product backed by strong ethical values and a rich industry heritage."

Also of note is Hanpure's investment in education and communication, including an in-house media suite producing academic content, documentaries, educational videos, and industry events.

"We see our role as not only supplying products but also helping build understanding and trust in New Zealand deer velvet among practitioners and consumers alike," Alex explains.

Despite the economic slowdown in Korea, imports of New Zealand deer velvet have grown steadily over recent years. Russian velvet used to be the dominant player but that has changed as more practitioners recognise the advantages of New Zealand's production systems, quality assurance, research, and animal welfare standards.

The nature of deer velvet consumption has changed considerably over the past decade. Previous generations regarded velvet-based herbal medicine as a premium health investment for maintaining wellbeing and vitality.

However, growing affluence within Korean society has brought with it accessibility to an increased range of healthcare and wellness products and options, including modern pharmaceuticals, nutritional supplements, and off-the-shelf health products. As such, younger generations have less familiarity with traditional medicine than their parents and grandparents. They also want scientific evidence to back purchasing decisions and are influenced by changing lifestyle trends.

"The market today is more competitive than it was a decade ago. However, we believe this challenge also creates new opportunities," Alex says.

"By strengthening scientific research, modernising communication, and educating both practitioners and consumers, we can help a new generation better understand the value of New Zealand deer velvet." ■



PRESCRIPTION PREP: Deer velvet and herbs are precisely weighed by a licensed pharmacist.



SORTED & PACKAGED: Final sorting and packaging of New Zealand deer velvet at Hanpure's factory in Pocheon.

Lasting impression



ON FARM: The Hanpure delegation at Raincliff Station.

The dedication and commitment of deer farmers impressed Alex Chung.

"I met several younger farmers who were making significant investments in their businesses and working incredibly hard to build successful futures. Experiences like these gave me both a deep sense of admiration and a strong sense of responsibility to help ensure that the value created by New Zealand farmers is recognised and appreciated in our market."

Meeting past and present researchers and velvet-focused scientists such as Ken Drew, Jimmy Suttie, and Stephen Haines was another memorable experience.

"Their dedication and vision helped shape not only New Zealand's deer velvet industry but also contributed significantly to the development of the Korean market. Meeting them gave me a much deeper appreciation of the history behind the industry we benefit from today."

TKM market: Size and scale

The TKM sector comprises more than 16,000 clinics, collectively consuming several hundred tonnes of deer velvet in medicinal forms each year. The sector generated an estimated NZ\$13.9 billion in revenue in 2023. Of that, deer velvet was the single largest category item, accounting for about NZ\$51.5 million.

"While the health functional food sector has grown significantly in recent years, it's important to recognise that its growth was built upon the long-established foundation of the TKM market," Alex says.

"For decades, practitioners have introduced generations of Korean consumers to deer velvet and helped build trust in its use."

However, the challenge was to educate and communicate the velvet story to younger consumers.

"We must tell its story, its heritage, the science behind it, and the values that underpin its production. That is why Hanpure continues to invest in research, educational programmes, media content, and industry collaboration."

His vision for Hanpure and the New Zealand velvet industry is summed up in three words: One team, together.

"I firmly believe that Hanpure and the New Zealand deer velvet industry share a common future. If we are to achieve sustainable growth, we must continue to work as partners and deepen our understanding of one another."



NZDFA Executive Committee: Chair Evan Potter, Tom Macfarlane, Richard Greer and Grant Hasse

National Velvet Competition

Hard antler is out and a new commercial category are the big changes at this year's 44th National Velvet Competition.

The decision to sideline the Hard Antler category was a difficult one, Southland DFA's Jane Campbell says.

"We made the call because of rising operational costs and low entry numbers," she says.

But velvet growers will have another option: a Commercial Pair category calling for two heads, elk or red, from animals three-years-old or over. The category will be split into two classes – under 6 kg and over 6 kg.



REDCOATS: Judges at last year's competition, Alan Clarke (left) and Josh Gill.

"This is for entrants who don't sell sire stags. We hope that velvet growers will get behind this new class and exhibit the cream of their crop."

Bruce Paterson has stepped aside from the competition coordinator role, and Cam Nelson has replaced him.

"We're really grateful for the nine years Bruce has dedicated to the role," Jane says. "We're excited to have Cam take his place. He's been on the committee for many years and has played a big part in the weighing and judging, so the transition will be straightforward."

The competition results will be emailed following the event, with a hard copy included in the December issue of *Deer Industry News*.

Weighing and judging will be held over two days, 5–6 December. Awards night will be at the Ascot Park Hotel on Monday, 7 December, with velvet viewing from 5.15 pm. Lock in the date now!

Next Gen sparks fresh thinking for agronomist

Taking part in this year's Next Generation – her fourth – was another opportunity for Agricom agronomist Holly Stokes to expand her deer farming knowledge.

All the Next Generation events have been worthwhile, she says.

"I always find them interesting, and they give me a good opportunity to learn about deer farming throughout the country. I'm biased, because of my agronomy background, to learn more about what pastures and crops farmers are using and why."

At this year's event, the incompatibility of AR37 endophyte ryegrass and deer in upper North Island farming systems was of particular interest to Holly.

"Ryegrasses in the Waikato face a lot of pest pressure. Dairy farmers can use AR37 endophyte grasses to reduce the pest issue, but deer farmers can't because of the health issues it causes. I had never realised the impacts it has on their systems. It's made me start thinking about some alternatives for deer, and it's something I want to follow up."

Holly, Agricom's Upper South Island Extension Agronomist, says her employer has allowed her to pursue and combine an agronomy career with her passion for deer.

As well as attending Next Generation, Agricom are willing to give her time and training to take on a facilitator role of a Canterbury deer farm discussion group, of which her dad Stu is a member.

"It will be a really cool experience and opportunity," she says

See page 33 for more about Holly and agronomy in action on the Stokes family farm.



DEER MEETS AGRONOMY: Holly Stokes was able to engage her career and love of deer at this year's Next Generation event.

Keep them coming

Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News Editor

Now in its 14th year, the appetite for Next Generation shows no sign of waning.



OUTSTANDING: Raroa Deer and Oraka Farms were popular stop-offs with the Next Gen group.

This year's group of 40 participants covered the paddock-to-plate deer farming chain, with visits to farms and businesses in the northern North Island.

Farm managers, farm shepherds, animal healthcare technicians, vets, Smedley students, and a few not actively employed in the industry but keen to find out more were all part of this year's lineup.

The two-day programme, coordinated by the Waikato and Bay of Plenty DFA branches, included visits to Raroa Deer and Oraka Farms, venison processors Silver Fern Farms and Duncan NZ, Gallagher Animal Management, and specialist velvet and co-product business NZ Deer Supreme.

In a feedback survey, almost all of the respondents said they found the event a valuable learning experience (92%) and one that they would recommend to others (96%).

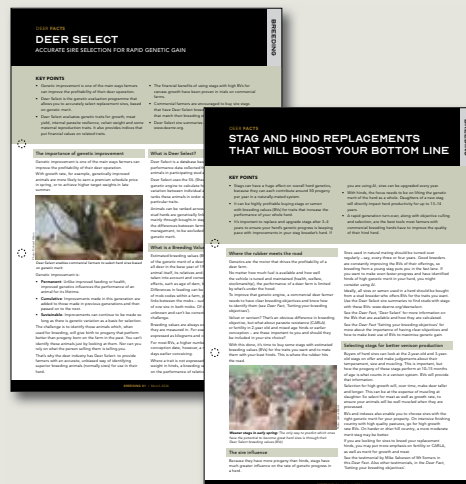
One respondent noted how most of the visits showed in some way the hard work, planning, effort and compliance required to produce high-quality venison and velvet products for human consumption.

A highlight for many were the visits to Gallagher Animal Management and the venison processing plants.

"Being able to visit Silver Fern Farms was a privilege given the health and safety aspects. It was very interesting to be taken along the chain," said one respondent.

The chance to get on farm was, as always, valued, with several enjoying the chance to visit two vastly different management systems but both focused on optimising deer health and performance.

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Deer Facts are produced by DINZ in association with the Ministry for Primary Industries to help deer farmers run profitable farm management systems that are recognised for their high standards of animal welfare and environmental performance.

Respondents said the coverage and topics had inspired them to follow up some topics such as pasture varieties and management, how to maximise land use, and ways to use technology for animal management.

Asked about future Next Generation topics, respondents mentioned more detail on velvet production, deer health, practical deer handling, yard layouts and examples, pastures and pasture management, and some practical interpretation and application of genetic information. The list and suggestions could be a valuable starting point for next year's programme, set to return to the South Island.



SAFETY FIRST: Next Generation participants were kitted out in PPE before an informative walk through Silver Fern Farms Rotorua venison plant.



DIVERSE: This year's Next Generation group included vets, farm shepherds, students and animal healthcare technicians.

Animal health in the spotlight

Animal health challenges, particularly lameness and ticks, were centre stage at the Deer 2 Succeed field day hosted by the Hawke's Bay DFA on 30 July.

The crowd of more than 40 farmers heard about the problem and management of lameness in deer, especially after yarding for weaning or trucking off the farm.

Finding staff with experience in handling deer was another topic raised during a group session at the field day.

Local deer farmer and vet Richard Hilson says the staffing issue is not just confined to farming deer. He's also concerned about the capability of staff employed in the trucking industry and at OSPRI, particularly the ones dealing with on-farm testing for Tb.

The practical-based discussions around lameness, including farmer experience from Richard Lawson, were well received by the crowd, who asked for more on managing health challenges at future events. Other popular suggestions were new research, coping with the looming El Niño weather system and subsequent impacts, and more on what is being done to rebuild the national deer herd.

For more on lameness, see page 34.



SKILLS SHORTAGE: Richard Hilson, a co-organisier of the event, said the shortage and capability of staff was an issue across the farming sector.

Tick talk

Ticks were also widely discussed during a guest speaker session at the field day. Colin McKay, a veterinarian with Elanco, provided a back-to-basics summary of ticks, covering the life cycle of the Asian Long Horn Tick, now found across most of the North Island and pockets of the South Island, including Kaikoura and the Nelson-Marlborough provinces.

Farmers started to notice ticks more from 1977 after the insecticide DDT was banned in fertiliser. In 2012, ticks hit the headlines again when the tick-borne disease Theileria was discovered, Colin said.

Ticks have a four-stage life cycle – starting with the egg, then a larval stage, followed by a nymph stage and lastly, the adult tick.



Each stage of the life cycle requires a blood feed, which is when the damage is done to hosts such as deer or lambs.

Each stage can go into a dormant phase until environmental conditions more conducive to ticks re-appear.

“There is no wonder chemical to give tick control to a level where you don’t have to worry about them, so you always have to consider your environment,” he said.

Adult ticks are most active in November and December.

“A key part is that the on-animal stage is quite short, so you need to protect most at-risk animals at that time.”

His advice was to avoid grass species that form a clump, such as *paspalum*. Grazing pastures with ewes that can handle a high level of tick infestation was another good tick control option.

There are limited registered products for the control of ticks. The pour-on option Bayticol and three generic versions are the favoured control option. There are others that use the same active ingredient family in Bayticol, including Python ear tags and Ripcord.

Colin said it’s risky to rely on one class of chemical, especially when there has been no new research into tick control for 25 years.



CROWD TALK: Lameness and ticks were the big topics of the day.

Barbara Matuschka

The love and respect for Barbara Matuschka was evident from the 456 people who gathered at the Wairakei Hotel in late August to celebrate her life and legacy.



Barbara was the significant ‘other half’ of deer farming pioneer and NZDFA life member Murray, who said he’d been lucky to find the right woman. He was immensely proud of Barbara and her unwavering support during their 70-year marriage. The couple share-milked their way into farm ownership of Kitenui, near Taupo, and in the mid-1970s started farming deer with the backing of Taupo entrepreneur Gary Akers. Murray’s contributions to the deer industry – all with the backing of Barbara – have been many and varied, including his crafting of life-size concrete and bronze deer sculptures. In 1996, the couple established the Matuschka Award to acknowledge ‘grassroots battlers’ who had contributed to the deer industry. *Deer Industry News* extends our condolences to Murray and the Matuschka family. ■

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Tech collars for deer?

Gallagher's eShepherd wearable collar is fast finding favour across the dairy and beef sectors in New Zealand, Australia, the United States and South America.

The solar-powered GPS neckbands let farmers virtually fence and move cattle, while future developments are likely to include integrated dry matter assessment and more individual animal data collection.

The Next Generation crowd were keen to know when the eShepherd collars would be adapted for deer. Gallagher's Darrell Jones said deer were on the radar, but the immediate priority was to finetune the technology for use in beef and dairy systems.

But as Deer Industry News discovered, the collar technology has been used before on deer, but for behavioural monitoring rather than virtual fencing.

At Bioeconomy Science Institute (formerly AgResearch), specially developed activity collars were used in research led by Bryan Thompson on the Invermay deer farm.

The collars used GPS and accelerometers to track deer grazing, ruminating, and resting behaviours for Bryan's PhD research looking at the development of a behavioural phenotype.

The deer adapted well to the collars, and Bryan believes they would adapt to virtual fencing collars, which had the potential to cut costs for farmers.

"It's something we've been talking about to Gallagher and their predecessors around development of this technology for deer. The reality is that the industry is just too small at this stage to support investment."

But he believes that there is more potential in the deer industry than for sheep or cattle due to the high cost of fencing in the hill country.

He suspects that deer will adapt to virtual fencing collars given their track record of adapting to a range of new management systems over the past 50 years of farming them, as well as their acute hearing and sense of smell.

"They habituate well to new things. They behave the same as sheep and cattle behind an electric fence, so I don't see it being an issue, but we won't know until we put the collars on." ■



SMART COLLAR: A 2.2 kg eShepherd wearable held by Gallagher's Darren Smith.

Body condition scoring made simple

Central Otago vet and deer farmer Becks Smith, who featured in Deer Industry News, Issue 130 (Run on the sun) has once again applied her agri-entrepreneurial skills, this time for the development of StockScore, a phone app to help farmers capture and analyse body condition score data more effectively.

The motivation behind a StockScore came from years spent working alongside farmers as both a veterinarian and a farmer herself, Beck says.

"I've seen first-hand how valuable body condition scoring is when it's done consistently. But I've also seen how often those records disappear into notebooks, scraps of paper, or simply get forgotten. I wanted to build something that fits naturally into the way people already work, rather than becoming another piece of farm software that gets in the way of the job."

The app provides direct access to industry-recognised body condition scoring guidance, making it easy for users to refresh their knowledge whenever required.

To learn more about the platform or start a free trial go to www.stockscore.co.nz.



BCS APP: StockScore is a body condition score phone app developed by Becks Smith.

El Niño is on its way

Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News Editor

Prepare for the worst and hope for the best.

That's the best advice given Earth Science's warnings of a 'very strong' El Niño over spring and summer of 2026/27.

The 'very strong' classification means that the sea surface temperature is expected to be 2°C warmer, causing atmospheric shifts that include changes in air pressure, trade winds, cloud cover, and rainfall patterns.

What that's likely to mean weatherwise is more frequent westerly winds throughout the country; drier conditions in the east; and wetter than usual conditions in western areas of the South Island, as well as parts of Otago and Southland.

Media warnings of El Niño and the erratic and extreme weather it could bring is understandably raising the anxiety levels of farmers.

There's a cautionary vibe among farmers, BakerAg consultant Matt Carroll notes, which was obvious at the early spring cattle sales, where demand and prices of lighter weight lines were subdued due to the unknowns around summer feed supplies.

The reality is that most farmers will take an El Niño-induced hit in production, but they can control and lessen the blow with planning, Matt says.

"Play with the numbers so you know exactly what you need to do to keep the basics maintained and prevent the effects spilling over into next season."

Number crunching included feed budgeting to get a good understanding of what feed was on hand and what was available, feed requirements of stock – especially capital stock – and building in the costs of supplementary feeding.

"Also decide how you will use any excess spring growth. Will you, for example, use it to put condition on trade stock to get a few more dollars, or will you bale it and set it aside, so you have it up your sleeve. It's about trying to line up your ducks before El Niño arrives."

Deer-specific management should focus on protecting the breeding hinds – the capital base.

That meant monitoring and maintaining hind condition to minimise flow-on production effects into the next season.

Practical steps could be sending lambs for slaughter at weaning to free up grazing for hinds, removing dry hinds and wet-dries as soon as possible, and keeping up conversations with buyers if stock has to be offloaded at lighter weights.

In a serious drought situation, pre- rather than post-rut weaning will help maintain hind condition and improve chances of

conception, though the trade-off was lighter weaners.

"It's another way of limiting the impacts to one season...It may be that you have to bite the bullet and take a bit of a hit."

The importance of preparing and planning ahead of El Niño was also emphasised by Canterbury agricultural consultant Wayne Allan. He's taken on board his own advice, updating information on dealing with drought for up-and-coming presentations.

His deer-specific management tips to alleviate drought-induced system pressures were based on matching feed requirements according to deer class needs at key times of the year. Maintaining hind condition during lactation was one such time, and investing in feed in late lactation to boost fawn growth and improve conception rates in hinds. However, stag feed could be cut back during late summer following velvet harvest, then increased post-rut to replace weight loss.

In a lingering drought situation, weaners could be sold on the store market to reduce feed pressure. He emphasised that any management change should be made with overall deer health in mind. ■



NUMBER CRUNCH: Review feed budgets and plan for worst-case, no-growth scenarios, Matt Carroll says.

Drought plan overview

- Build flexibility into your farm system
 - » Identify stock that can be sold when feed becomes tight
- Have a tactical plan of how to manage the drought
 - » Have trigger points for action
 - » Act early to protect stock condition and feed reserves
- Protect capital stock, particularly the younger classes and high-performing animals
 - » Have feed for mating, pre-lambing/calving and mid/late lactation
- Understand the feed options
 - » Grain or nuts can be great to provide a high-quality boost at critical times
 - » Nitrogen is often the cheapest feed
 - » Grazing off farm has the biggest impact on protecting feed for remaining stock
- Have a good support network – both business contacts and personal support

Source: Wayne Allan, Allan Agricultural Consulting Ltd

Resources

DINZ – Droughts – how to survive the dry

www.deernz.org.nz/deer-hub/feeding/feeding-deer/droughts-how-to-survive-the-dry

Earth Sciences New Zealand - El Niño 2026: What you need to know

www.earthsciences.nz/news/el-nino-2026-what-you-need-to-know

Ministry for Primary Industries – Preparing for El Niño

www.mpi.govt.nz/funding-rural-support/adverse-events/preparing-for-el-nino

Weaner sale agreement a win-win for Hawke's Bay farming families

Tony Leggett, Deer Industry News writer

Open communication and shared goals are two key ingredients of a successful deer breeding and finishing operation run by two Central Hawke's Bay families.



BENEFICIAL: Richard Lawson (left) and Tom Holden have built a successful deer breeding and finishing partnership based on trust and transparency. Weaners are sent from the Lawson's property to the Holdens in pre- and post-rut consignments at an agreed price per kg.

Hill country farmers Richard and Emma Lawson have successfully aligned their weaner production system to feed annual draft lines into the Holden family's finishing unit on the flats at Forest Gate near Ongaonga.

The Lawsons sell their weaner stags and surplus weaner hinds in split consignments, pre- and post-rut, using a pricing grid to establish a per kilogram rate.

Richard says he and Emma know they are selling at what is traditionally the weakest time of year for weaner prices, but they are content that the 59% yield factor and being able to wean and truck them on the same day helps to balance the pricing to a fair level. The deer are also weighed as they leave the Lawsons, not as they arrive at the Holdens.

He says the agreed yield percentage may differ to other weaner producers who have similar finisher relationships, and he recalls when the annual Taihape weaner fair was running, prices were more like 70% of the schedule of the day for stags.

The Lawsons' home farm is tucked under the Ruahine Range and is naturally divided into two main blocks – 260 ha of rolling country, all deer fenced, and another 314 ha block of deer-fenced hill country, rising from 380 to 730 metres above sea level.

They lease a further 150 ha of flats nearby, owned by Richard's

parents in their Riverslea Trust. It has no deer fencing and is used for cattle and lamb finishing. Total stock numbers wintered are 1200 mixed-age hinds and replacements, plus 570 finishing cattle and about 700 low-input Wiltshire sheep.

The cattle are wintered at the lease block, but most will be trucked the 40 minutes to the home farm to keep any summer surplus feed under control and provide a mixed livestock grazing regime.

The Lawsons usually bank on a reliable 1800 mm rainfall, spread evenly over the year. Surprisingly, August is usually their driest month, often delivering only 40 mm of rain.

Their hinds spend 11 months of the year grazing the hill country, which the Lawsons have left in large paddocks (the biggest is 120 ha), a deliberate call to provide open space and a natural setting for hinds to fawn without disturbance.

The weaner sale agreement means the Lawsons can focus on their breeding hinds, all reds bred on English and Eastern bloodlines.

"We pretty much try to grow the biggest weaner we can and send them to the Holdens," Richard says.

Fawns born to first- and second-fawning hinds are weaned and moved pre-rut to provide time for them to recover before stags are introduced, and to reduce feed demand across the farm leading into winter.

"We keep a big selection of replacement weaner hinds, usually about 260," Richard says.

Next year, they will keep fewer replacements after buying mixed-age hinds off the Middelberg family, who recently sold their farm and dispersed their herd.

"Our cut-off point for hind fawns weaned pre-rut is 55 kg. That goes out to 58-60 kg, depending on the year, for hind fawns weaned post-rut."

Richard says they have usually selected the heaviest weaner hinds as replacements, but with dry hinds killing out at 70 kg-plus, they feel they are hitting a limit for mature hind weight.

Sire stags are bought from both Forest Road Farm and Melior studs, with emphasis on meat production, not velvet.

The Lawsons accept that their split weaning does mean those weaned post-rut typically mate later than those weaned pre-rut. But the extra 10-15 kg of liveweight in the fawns is "massive" when they leave the farm to the Holdens for finishing.

Good communication

Usually in January each year, the Lawsons meet informally with Tom and his father Duncan for a debrief on the previous year's arrangements and to discuss any changes required heading into the current year.

Both the Lawsons and Holdens say good dialogue is critical to the success of their system. They see each other regularly at local events, and the initial meeting rarely produces any surprises for either party.

Tom says one of the key discussion points is setting up the likely weeks for weaning both pre- and post-rut to allow the Holdens to prepare for their new arrivals.

"We know which weeks that weaning will take place, then we just look at weather forecasts and pick our days off that," he says.

In previous years, Tom has helped with the weaning phase at the Lawsons, and the aim is always to work in with weather and workloads for both families.

After experiencing a surge in lameness, the weaners are trucked to the Holdens only on the bottom deck, in loads of 130 to fit the holding capacity of an area in the Holdens' shed that is set up with sponge-filled floor mats, soaked in a solution of dissolved zinc sulphate. The solution has proven to reduce lameness caused by infections in the feet of the weaners from being yarded and transported to the Holdens' farm.

The mats are set up in the loading ramp and the drench pen. The solution is mixed in a bucket, and the mats are topped up every 40-50 weaners to maintain its active ingredient strength.

The pre-rut weaners are already tagged and had their first Yersiniavax injection when they arrive at the Holdens, so they receive their clostridial vaccinations plus their second Yersiniavax jab and an internal parasite drench before leaving the shed.

"For our post-rut weaners, we don't do anything. They are up on the hill with their mothers and don't come down until the stags go out. Then we bring them down in late April, and they are on our rolling country for about 10 days while we tag them and sort them up," Richard says.

Using a single truck and only filling the bottom deck means the Lawsons are holding some deer in their yards for several hours, but they have installed rubber matting to reduce injury risks and pressure when deer are in the shed.

The pricing grid

Setting the price starts with a discussion Richard and Tom have with venison exporter First Light to establish which markets are the likely future destinations for their animals and what the indicative price is from each market.

They apply an average carcass yield of 59% and add 40 c/kg to their agreed overall price for stags and subtract 40 c/kg for hinds. The Lawsons pay the cost for tags and any animal health treatments while the weaners are at their farm, and the Holdens cover any future management and health costs.

"We do re-look at our pricing post the rut, but in the past, there's never really much difference between prices pre- and post-rut," Tom Holden says.

Both families accept they are trying to price weaners based on their likely slaughter value several months in the future, at a time when export contract prices have not been released by exporters.

Any pre-rut weaners that die within seven days of arrival at the Holdens are losses incurred by the Lawsons. For those weaned post-rut, the 'deaths' interval is five days.

A photograph is taken of the tag of any weaner that dies so the Lawsons keep their NAIT records up to date.

Both parties have agreed to discuss any significant change in breeding strategy, particularly sire breed choice.

"We have considered using more wapiti, but our hinds are mated on the hill so we would need to buy a lot more wapiti bulls to cover them compared to our reds, and there's also the risk of interaction between wapiti and red stags, and we want to avoid any disasters," Richard says.



NEXT GEN HINDS: Weaner hinds selected as replacements for Richard and Emma Lawson's Hawke's Bay hill country breeding farm.

Solutions found for lameness in weaners

Pinpointing the cause of lameness in deer is often a frustrating exercise because there may be several factors to consider.

Speaking at the recent Deer 2 Succeed field day in Central Hawke's Bay, veterinarian Camille Flack said after one notably challenging season recently when many deer on several farms were showing signs of lameness, she led a discussion with a local Advance Party group to consider the possible causes and practical solutions.

The discussion, which included both the Lawsons and Holdens, highlighted the variability of infections which show up as lameness.

Camille says lameness results from three primary factors – a bacterium being present, an entry point being created in the animal, and a set of conditions that bacteria will thrive in.

Heavier, healthier deer might get infected by a bacterium, but not be as impacted as lighter, less resistant deer in the same mob.

For Richard Lawson, dealing with large mobs of hinds with fawns at foot at weaning is a high-risk period for infections to begin.

"Richard's choice was to get flooring, and it is definitely one of the factors to reduce lameness because in his case, deer were waiting to be let out and were standing on concrete for a long time," Camille says.

Using the bottom deck of the truck to transport weaners down to the Holdens had an immediate effect on lameness when Richard discovered the top deck grating had a thin metal bar running through each pen. He saw that his weaner deer were sometimes standing on top of the bar with their hooves split either side of it, increasing the risk of cuts and abrasions and creating an entry point for bacteria.

Richard also changed his weaning system, letting the weaner deer out sooner. When he ran out of room to hold the hinds, with limited external yards and hundreds of animals in at once, he laid

lime on the floor of some deer-proof cattle yard pens next to his deer shed to protect feet and keep them cleaner.

Hosing out pens between mobs to reduce the risk of infection was another addition to the Lawsons' lameness reduction policy. Checking all the yards and laneways for any wire or nails that could cut or wound small feet was another.

After making several changes to their weaning process, the Lawsons found the number of deer that were lame after last year's weaning had reduced to just two.

Richard says it is frustrating when no lameness shows up after the weaners are tagged 14 days before weaning or when they are being loaded for delivery to the Holdens, only to appear after they arrive and also in the replacement weaner hinds retained at home as well.

Tom Holden says keeping yard time down to a minimum for the newly arrived weaners was a big factor in reducing lameness on their farm.

Another lameness reduction management move is minimising the number of trips around the shed for each treatment or action, such as weighing, drenching, or vaccinating. They prefer to do all the required treatments and weighing in one pen, rather than shifting them between pens for each activity.

Deer farmer and vet Richard Hilson advised getting a vet involved early if there are signs of lameness. Finding the entry



PLANNING & PREP: The weeks for pre- and post-rut weaning are scheduled in advance, with the actual days locked in according to weather and workloads, Tom says.



BIRDS EYE VIEW: Looking out over the Lawson's hill country farm. The Lawsons focus solely on weaner production and supply them to the Holdens' specialist finishing farm at nearby Ongaonga.

Rubber flooring proves a gamechanger



THE LOWDON ON LAMENESS – Richard said rubber matting installed in the deer shed and holding yards had reduced lameness in weaner deer.

A significant reduction in lameness has been achieved after Richard and Emma Lawson invested in a rubber flooring product to cover the concrete floors in the holding yards and handling shed on their Central Hawke's Bay deer farm.

After investigating a variety of options, including interlocking mats, Richard and Emma went for a product that is made from car and truck tyre chips, supplied in 20 kg bags. A resin glue binds it together and to the concrete floor underneath to create a seamless, sealed, soft and grippy surface that is 12-15 mm thick.

The product was supplied by Superior Rubber Surfaces, a Hamilton-based company that has contractors around the country to handle installations for deer, dairy and equine properties.

Before the flooring was installed, Richard and Emma water-blasted their shed and yard floors to ensure they were clean and dust-free.

Laying the flooring material took two workers six days to complete and cost the Lawsons close to \$50,000 in total, including the steel strips to protect the leading edge of the flooring at all the entry points.

Richard says the new surface is slightly more slippery than the original broom-surface concrete. It also takes more time to clean after use than concrete, but it's a cost he is happy to wear because of the lower incidence of lameness, particularly in their weaners.

The flooring comes with a one-year warranty, but Richard says it is proving a durable option for several other deer farmers, including Invermay near Dunedin and on a large South Island property that is velvetting about 1800 stags each season.

"I'm told they put in this flooring product five years ago and have only just replaced it in their drafting circle. On that basis, we can expect to get a much longer life out of it here with less deer and a lot less shed activity," Richard says.

A year on from being installed, he says the product is not showing any signs of lifting or tearing.

point will likely require a post-mortem to pinpoint it, which can be helpful when solutions are being considered.

Tom says he likes to release weaners from the Lawsons in mobs of 60 because they are wintered in mobs of 120, and it's a simple job of merging two mobs at the right time.

He sets up mobs with a paddock gap in the middle for the first 2-3 weeks and uses a drone to shift them rather than going into the paddock with a bike and dog.

"If they break with the drone above them, I just lift the drone up higher, and they settle quickly again. We also use nanny hinds in with each mob to get them used to gates and just de-stress," he says.

"Big days in the yards are avoided, and we choose our drier paddocks to keep them clean too.

"We've lost one weaner this year versus 30 last year. It was a great bit of weather at arrival time, which certainly helped," he says.

Balancing the risk of getting the whole mob into the yards to treat one deer for lameness is always a tricky decision.

"If they are lame in the mob, then I tend to leave them. If they are on their own, then I'll bring them in, which is another reason to keep the mob size lower and take out some of the risk of yarding big mobs of young deer."

Camille says in spite of breaking three golden rules – yarding big mobs of hinds and fawns together, weaning straight on to a truck and then to a new farm – the Lawsons and Holdens have been able to reduce infections in their deer to more acceptable levels through a focus on the three primary factors involved.

"In both cases, they have accepted that there are some things they can't change, but they both found there were improvements they could make, and the results are very rewarding for them," she says. ■

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Oraka takes weaners indoors for winter

Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News Editor

A super-sized indoor wintering barn is the latest development at Oraka Farms' intensive dairy and deer operation, between Tirau and Matamata.



NEW THINKING: The move to large-scale indoor wintering is treating weaners in a different way to improve efficiencies over the entire operation, Ian says.

Oraka Farms

Intensive deer and dairying as well as maize cropping over five farms and one leased deer property, which owner Ian Scott runs in conjunction with a vet business.

342 ha (315 ha effective), including a 40 ha leased block and 175 ha of deer-fenced area. Stock on hand, mid-June:

Deer	Head	Su/hd
MA hinds, red	419	2.9
MA hinds, wapiti	190	4.5
R2 in fawn hinds, red	100	2.7
R2 in fawn hinds, wapiti	35	4.3
R1 hinds	240	2.7
R1 stags	240	3.2
R2 stags, red	117	3.3
R2 stags, wapiti	40	4.5
Red stags	300	3.5
Wapiti stags	148	5.0
Total deer	(approx) 6,200	35 su/ha

Dairy cattle

MA cows	402	10
R2 cows	82	9
R1 cows	121	7
Bulls	21	7
Autumn-born calves	30	3
Total animal SU (approx)		11,500

Owner Ian Scott is hoping that the great indoors will ramp up overall deer farm production by increasing growth rates and shortening the time it takes to grow weaners, while reducing the environmental footprint and enhancing sustainability.

But the move indoors is not purely production driven. There are management benefits also, especially during the problem autumn period when potential animal health issues manifest.

“Elk and wapiti hate autumn in the Waikato. Often the grass quality is poor because it's dry, but as soon as it rains, they get facial eczema.”

In addition to that is their vulnerability to worm parasites and ryegrass staggers, which is inevitable when endophyte levels increase in under-stress ryegrass pastures.

Moving inside also prevents animals from damaging pasture from fenceline pacing during cold, wet winter conditions. In addition, according to Invermay research, hunkering down indoors could save approximately 20% of the animal's daily energy that would otherwise be used on maintaining body temperature in bad weather.

“So, there's the option to feed them less inside, but what we're working to do is feed the same or more and optimise its value through better animal performance.”

Ian explains he's perfectly placed to pursue high-quality feeding in an indoor environment, drawing on the knowledge and systems developed for Oraka's high-producing dairy herd.

“We have all the infrastructure and plant. We grow the maize silage, which forms the base of their diet. We have the mixer wagons, big payloaders, and the storage bunkers for palm kernel maize and more. We have the ability to create the right diets, so it's just about tailoring it to get the right protein, energy balance, dry matter, and palatability, optimising it through our feeding system.”



The opportunity to move weaners indoors for winter came along in late 2024 when Ian became aware of a vacant neighbouring 6000 m² dairy goat indoor milking facility. It was a perfect platform for large-scale indoor wintering, which he trialled on a limited scale last year, negotiating an informal lease and converting 1000 m² for 420 weaners. They went indoors later than ideal, but the overall result encouraged Ian to push ahead.

Earlier this year, a long-term lease was signed for the entire 6000 m², and in mid-June, an intake of 900 were post-rut weaned from hinds into a penned space of 3000 m². The weaners were in farm groups allowing each animal 2.5 m²-plus and a sample of animals weighed for a benchmark on which to track growth.

Ian is using the diet of his partially housed System 5 winter-milk dairy cows as a guide for the feeding of weaners. System 5 is a DairyNZ-defined production system where 50–69% of feed used throughout lactation is home-grown, with the remainder imported. The base diet is maize silage, supplemented with PKE, dry distillers grain, and tapioca. It's fed every second day or sooner according to appetite, along the outside of pens that weaners access through head stalls. The maize silage is harvested slightly earlier than recommended for higher protein, improved palatability, and less fibre.

"There's the option to feed them less inside, but what we're working to do is feed the same or more and optimise its value through better animal performance."

Ian Scott

Red clover, a favourite with deer, is also included. It's in baleage form, available ad lib within each pen from a bale feeder.

The young deer got the taste for the indoor diet alongside their mothers, who were fed the maize silage and supplements in the lead-up to weaning.

Their stay indoors will be dictated by grass growth back on the home farm. The high-priority outdoor wintered classes – velvet stags or trophy stags – get the first pick of early spring pasture. As growth takes off, other mobs follow, including the indoor weaners. This process allows a close fit between feed demand and pasture growth curves, Ian says.

Data driven

Oraka Farms' weaner indoor wintering shed was the final stop on the first day of this year's Next Generation event. By this stage of the day, attendees were confident and comfortable at firing questions to speakers. The script was flipped at Oraka, however, with Ian firing several questions at the crowd.

"How many kilograms of dry matter per hectare are you growing and how much is utilised?" he asked.

The question reinforced the importance of knowing, understanding, and measuring performance of the land asset – the growth base, in every sense, of every farming business.

Think about the numbers all the time and use them to guide asset development and growth, he said.

The modus operandi throughout his farming career has been to buy the best, highest-producing land from which to generate more cashflow than his neighbours.

"If I can do that, I'm in a better position when I go to the bank and ask for money to buy the next farm down the road."

It has taken a lifetime and \$25 million of capital investment to develop the high-quality soils of Oraka Farms into an intensive and efficient deer-dairying system generating annual turnover of \$5 million.

The dairy farm is in the highest producing cohort, turning out annual production of 3500 kgMS/ha, which, based on an \$11/kg split calving payout, was generating \$40,000/ha income.

"Everything we do is about how to grow and use more from the hectares we have spent a lot of time and money on acquiring, in an environmentally sustainable way."



EYES WIDE OPEN: Manage your own risk by being fully focused on your goals, realistically understanding your markets, geopolitics, and your limitations. Don't count on someone else to manage these for you, Ian says.



Pushing the boundaries

Risk taking, backed by research and data, has been key in developing Oraka's intensively stocked, high productivity/low emissions and run-off dairy-deer system.

The latest development, the super-sized wintering shed for weaners, was another good example of a calculated risk.

Ian has previous first-hand, small-scale experience of indoor deer wintering, which taught him how to feed to reduce wastage. He also got insight from vet colleague and friend Dave Lawrence, who has many years' experience of wintering young wapiti bulls and weaners indoors. Successfully applying that knowledge at scale is the challenge – and a risk, he says.

"We want to know what it costs to winter a weaner indoors for a week, and how to refine the feeding to see if there is potential to increase the growth rate of these animals...but there's no recipe or research out there to tell us what to do."

But he's comfortable with risk-taking.

"I've always lived a bit on the fringe, and I'm always willing to push the boundaries and try new things in the interests of 'can I get animals to perform better, and can I realize more value out of my most expensive capital asset,' which is the value of the land."

He encouraged the Next Generation crowd to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

"If you don't live on the edge, you don't push the boundaries... you've got to be prepared to take a risk."



WELL-NOURISHED: Red clover is a high-quality feed source and a favourite with deer. The indoor-wintered weaners have ad-lib access to red clover baleage.



WELL-APPOINTED: The indoor space is light and spacious. The flooring, a maize stubble mixed with woodchips, stays dry and clean, providing the weaners comfortable bedding.

Mighty makeover



SUPER-SIZED: An exterior view of the 6000 m² shed. This year, 900 weaners were wintered in 3000 m². Dairy calves were wintered in 1000 m².

Conversion of the shed has been a \$120,000 capital cost project, the costs minimised by drawing on the skills of Ian's long-time, multi-talented Filipino staff member, Julio.

"He's a builder, an engineer, and a welder, and also has excellent elk handling skills."

The makeover included construction of pens and head stalls, enabling the young deer to access the maize silage and concentrate feeds spread along the outside of the pen. The head stalls are sized to prevent wastage, Ian explains.

"We knew that deer were bad at wasting feed, so we've sized the feeding holes so that they don't keep poking their heads in and out, dropping feed and trampling it."

The floor bedding material is maize stubble mixed with woodchips, which stays dry and clean. There will be a minimal scrape out once the weaners leave. The compost will be applied to cropping ground or paddock areas with low organic matter.

It's not a waste material at all; rather it's a key component of the dairying and deer nutrient recycling system, Ian says.

"It's got captive nutrients that we can analyse for NPK% rating, so we can then decide how much fertilizer we don't need to buy." ■

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Grass roots action at Riverslea

Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News Editor

On-hand agronomy expertise has encouraged Canterbury deer farmer Stu Stokes to forge ahead with fescue pasture mixes at Riverslea, Russells Flat, where 900 red velvet stags and 900 breeding hinds are run on 400 hectares in a partly irrigated system.



INTERGENERATIONAL: Bruce Stokes (right) with wife Pat started the family's deer farming love and legacy, continued today by Stu (left) and Holly.

His daughter Holly persuaded him to trial and introduce fescue mixes, specifically Haven (tall fescue) and Oakden (meadow fescue). The big advantage of the fescue mix is that growth kicks off as velvet stags come off winter crop, providing high-quality pasture to boost velvet growth.

"Tall fescue is a high-producing grass that performs well in our high fertility soils, but the problem is it can become unpalatable," Holly explains.

"Adding Oaken, a meadow fescue, can improve pasture palatability and has made overall pasture management easier. It's let Dad see how fescue can fit and work well in the farm system."

Stu is also looking at short-term ryegrass, which will also help turn out feed earlier than a perennial ryegrass.

Holly says her father was happy to take advice on new pastures so long as it was backed up with sound reasoning and evidence.

"He's always reviewing his pasture system to see if he can improve things, especially to see how he can get pasture going early in spring for the velvet stags when they come off crop."

Learning more about agronomy from Holly has been enjoyable, and the knowledge has brought a new strength to the family farming business, Stu says.

"My knowledge of fescues was based around the older varieties, but Holly has introduced me to some new ones, which are a lot better. She's influenced my thinking and helped kick off the introduction to them."

Although the oldest fescue pastures are only three to four years old, Stu has been impressed with the results.

Family deer farming legacy shapes ag career

Holly has inherited the family passion for deer farming. The deer connection was started by her grandfather, who live-recovered wild animals back in the 1970s as a diversification on the family's Canterbury sheep and beef farm. When Stu took over the farm, sheep and cattle were sidelined for the development of a red velvet production and hind replacement breeding system.

Holly always enjoyed helping out on the farm and the handling of deer alongside Stu. Upon leaving high school, she attended Lincoln University, where she completed a Bachelor of Agriculture with a view to employment in the livestock sector rather than the plant-based sector. Instead, she took a role at Agricom in late 2023 and has never regretted the decision.

"I've come to realise that the role is very much animal-based. Although I don't work directly with them, everything I do is related to them because it's about how the grasses and forage crops we grow can improve animal production and performance."

Holly describes her Agricom role as bridging the gap between R&D and the commercial farming environment. She oversees the trialling of grasses and a wide range of forage crops in farm locations that cover from the Rakaia River to the top of the South Island.

"It's about testing them in a trial environment to see how new or soon-to-be-released grasses and crops will perform and what to expect."

Working with the trial farmers and getting to understand their systems is a highlight, she says.

"The oldest fescue pastures haven't been ideally managed, but they've persisted, and I like how they complement the growth of red and white clover. We'll certainly push on with them."

He thinks most farmers could learn a lot from agronomists in terms of what grasses best fit their farming system.

"I think it's important to understand the strengths of each grass, their purpose, and why you might grow them."

Both Stu and Holly agree that they have a good working relationship.

"I enjoy working with her. She has strengths that I lack, and I have years of learned experience, and we both have a love affair with farming," Stu says. ■

Battling lameness in weaner deer

There's no silver-bullet solution for lameness in weaner deer, but the best way to avoid it is risk-based preventative management, Hawke's Bay vet Camille Flack says.

Lameness in weaners is one of those problems that can catch farmers out quickly. One day a mob of weaner deer looks settled, and a few days later there are numerous lame animals.

The rapid onset of lameness is a serious welfare concern and raises lots of questions about the cause and how best to treat it. The good news is that many of the contributing factors to lameness can be reduced with good planning.

Planning

Lameness in weaners is caused by three primary factors – the presence of bacteria, the creation of an entry point in the deer for the bacteria, and an environment for the bacteria to thrive in.

Farmers often ask why lameness is more pronounced in some animals and less so in others. The answer can be explained by the environment-animal-bacteria triangle. Lameness is worse if the animal and environment is compromised, and the bacteria is present in high numbers, while less so if there are factors working in the deer's favour.

A good starting point to mitigate the likelihood of lameness is to consider and examine before weaning any management practices that could cause stress, as well as structures within the built and natural environment that could cause lower leg and foot abrasions.

Make time to walk through the yards, shed, races, gateways and loading areas. Look at them from a weaner's point of view to identify anything that could injure their feet or make them panic and bunch together.

The key things to check for and eliminate include rough or new concrete, sharp stones, exposed wire, slippery surfaces, narrow pressure points, places where feet can jam, and areas where deer are likely to rush or baulk.

At weaning

Manage and handle deer mobs patiently and quietly. Avoid pushing a lot of weaners through yards or along netting fences as this can create a high stress environment leading them to rush and panic, making them vulnerable to injury and foot damage.

Other stress and panic-reducing management are visual barriers, boarded yard walls, and raceways that are clear of objects that could cause injury.

Try to limit the time the deer are in yards at weaning to reduce the likelihood of stress and injury. A good management tip to avoid a lengthy stay in the yards is sorting larger mobs into smaller mobs before weaning. Another time-saving tip is to apply health treatments or such before, rather than at, weaning.

Plan and manage the movement of weaned mobs. For example,

move newly weaned animals staying on-farm to a paddock rather than leave them in the yards while sale weaners are sorted.

After weaning

The first two weeks after weaning is the danger period for injury and lameness.

Select the driest, cleanest paddocks available for newly weaned mobs.

Familiar paddocks that are dry and clean and have familiar feed are ideal for newly weaned animals.

Watch muddy gateways, wallows, wet fence lines, and contaminated holding areas as these are ideal places for bacteria to build up. If practical, shift weaners within a few days to a fresh neighbouring paddock to reduce the risk of lameness.

Treatment

Deciding when to treat lame deer can be difficult. Yarding newly weaned animals to treat a few lame animals can do more harm than good. Conversely, holding off too long can result in more affected animals and a reduced likelihood of treatment success. The best strategy is to talk with your vet about when to intervene, how to handle affected deer, the treatment options, and withholding periods. ■

Checklist

- ✓ Keep weaner mobs at a manageable size, according to the available labour and facilities, so they are easier to move and handle.
- ✓ Remove sharp stones, sharp and exposed wire, rough sawn timber and edges, and potential foot traps from laneways, raceways and yards.
- ✓ Clean yards before weaning and improve drainage where needed.
- ✓ Maintain hygiene throughout the yarding process.
- ✓ Minimise the time weaners have standing in yards, races and sheds, especially if the surfaces are slippery, hard or rough.
- ✓ Use clean, dry paddocks where possible after weaning.
- ✓ Avoid muddy gateways, wallows and contaminated pressure points.
- ✓ Seek veterinary advice if lameness spreads quickly within the mob, deaths occur, or multiple limbs are affected.
- ✓ Review each outbreak afterwards to identify the risks and management techniques to reduce the chance of future lameness outbreaks.

Fifty years of deer farming, and we're only getting started

DINZ Board member and former DINZ Quality Assurance Manager John Tacon reflects on the rapid rise of the industry.

What an extraordinary journey deer farming in New Zealand has been.

In little more than half a century, we have taken an animal that was once regarded as a pest and built around it an innovative, exciting, and unique New Zealand farming industry. What a ride it's been!

First came the wild venison industry. Then came the helicopters chasing deer across some of the wildest country in New Zealand. Men jumped from machines to capture deer alive, and animals that had spent their lives roaming the mountains suddenly became the foundational stock for a completely new farming industry.

There were no textbooks telling us how to farm deer. There was no blueprint. We were learning as we went, and perhaps that was part of the attraction.

Deer challenged us. They made us think. They demanded good stockmanship, patience, and understanding.

The wild-caught animals of those pioneering days gradually gave way to generations of farm-bred deer. Genetics improved enormously, as did our understanding of deer nutrition, health and behaviour.

At the same time, our responsibilities as deer farmers grew. Animal welfare became increasingly important. Transport standards, farm quality assurance, and processing standards became part of an industry determined to demonstrate that we could farm these magnificent animals responsibly.

That evolution is something we should be immensely proud of. We weren't simply building another livestock industry. We were creating an industry recognised internationally for its venison and velvet farming expertise.

Our products travelled around the world, and our knowledge travelled with them.

But the real strength of the deer industry has always been its people. Deer farming has attracted innovators, characters, entrepreneurs, scientists, veterinarians, processors, marketers, transporters, and above all, farmers who genuinely love the animal.

Anyone who has farmed deer knows that special feeling of standing quietly in a paddock early in the morning, watching a mob of hinds and their fawns. There's the excitement of the roar,



the anticipation of fawning, the satisfaction of seeing young deer grow, and the challenge of constantly trying to do things better.

Deer farming gets under your skin. For many of us, it has never simply been a business. It has been a passion.

Of course, the journey hasn't always been easy, but adapting is exactly what this industry has always done. When there wasn't an established farming system, we invented one. When we needed better genetics, we developed them. When animal welfare expectations changed, we improved our systems. When markets changed, we went looking for new opportunities. When problems arose, people throughout the industry sat around a table and worked out how to solve them.

That pioneering spirit has never disappeared. And that is why, after more than fifty years, I remain enormously enthusiastic about the future of our industry.

The next generation will farm deer differently from the way we did fifty years ago – just as we farm them very differently today from those first pioneers. Technology will play a greater role. Genetics will continue to advance. Animal welfare and environmental credentials will become even more important. We will tell the story of New Zealand farmed venison and velvet to increasingly discerning consumers around the world.

But some things should never change. We must retain our willingness to innovate. We must retain our independence and determination. We must continue putting the welfare of the deer at the centre of what we do. And above all, we must retain the passion for this magnificent animal that created the industry in the first place.

The foundations have been laid. The experience has been earned. The passion is still there. And after everything we have achieved over these remarkable first fifty years, perhaps the most exciting thought of all is this: We're just getting started. ■

Deer Industry News

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See award-winning deer farming in action

What does it take to successfully farm deer in a demanding environment while looking after the land and preparing the business for the next generation?

Deer farmers will have the opportunity to find out at the upcoming Raincliff Station field day, hosted by David Morgan and family in South Canterbury.

The Morgans were standout environmental award winners at the 2025 Deer Industry Conference in Queenstown. Raincliff Station claimed both the Premier Elworthy Environmental Award, the industry's top environmental accolade, and the Streamlands Export Ltd Award for vision and management whilst mastering a demanding environment.

The judges summed up the operation as: "A strong family business, with impressive farm management of a complex deer farming operation while planning and managing the environmental risks and transitioning to the next generation."

Held every two years, the Environmental Awards are part of the deer industry's commitment to sustainable production, recognising farmers who combine profitable farming with strong environmental management, while encouraging the sharing of proven practices and innovation.

The field day is a chance to get behind the farm gate at Raincliff Station, see that award-winning approach first-hand, and hear the thinking behind the Morgans' farming, environmental and succession decisions. ■

A green-themed poster for the Raincliff Station Field Day. At the top left is a circular image of a deer. The title 'Raincliff Station Field Day' is in large white and orange letters. Below it, text reads 'Inside an Award Winning Transformation from Sheep to Sustainable Deer and Beef Farming' and 'Farming in a demanding environment - Elworthy Environmental Award and Streamlands Export Ltd Award for vision and management'. The event details are: 'TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER 12.30 pm START' and 'RAINCLIFF STATION Middle Valley Road'. A section titled 'What's Included' lists: 'Farm Tour - Bring 4WD', 'BBQ & Refreshments to follow', 'Brad Olsen - Infometrics', and 'Janet Gregory - Judge'. At the bottom left, it says 'Register Here Scan the QR code' next to a QR code. On the right, there are two circular images: one of a group of people and another of a deer in a field.

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 by Melior.

2 and 3 year old High Growth Rate Maternal and Terminal stags available via private treaty from early November 2026. Stags available to view at Melior via appointment with Tom or your local deer agent in Fairlie or Feilding.

Tom Macfarlane (027 600 8555)



Bourguignon pie

Graham Brown

Imagine a cold night, a roaring fire and family and friends gathered around to enjoy an evening's company. There could be no better dish than a warming, traditional baked pie. But here's one with a difference. Try using New Zealand farmed venison instead of more ordinary red meats. The rich, succulent flavour is something quite exceptional that is sure to wow your guests.

Prep time: 40 mins

Cook time: 2 hours



6
SERVES

Ingredients

Pie

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| 1 kg venison leg or shoulder, diced | 2 Tbsp tomato paste | 4 thick rashers of bacon, cut into lardons |
| 1 Tbsp paprika | 50 g button mushrooms | 300 g puff pastry |
| 3 Tbsp plain flour | 2 large onions, diced | Egg wash |
| salt and pepper, cracked | 4 cloves garlic, crushed | 1 egg yolk |
| 3 Tbsp vegetable oil | 1 tsp thyme leaves, finely chopped | Dash of milk or beaten cream |
| 2 carrots, diced | 1 Tbsp parsley, chopped | Sides |
| 1 leek, diced | 1 ½ cups Pinot Noir | Baked seasonal vegetables |
| 2 celery sticks, diced | 1 tsp red wine vinegar | |
| | 1 cup demi-glace or meat stock | |

Method

Venison

Coat the meat with the paprika, flour, salt and pepper.

Heat the oil and brown the meat all over. Add the vegetables and continue to brown. Add the remaining ingredients to the mixture.

Cook for 1 hour on low heat either in the oven or on the stove. Remove the dish and let it cool.

Pie

While the venison is cooling, dust a clean work surface with flour and roll the pie crust. Cut the pastry half a cm / 0.2" bigger than the pie dish.

Place cooked ingredients into a pie dish. Combine the egg wash ingredients and egg wash up the sides.

Cover the top of the pie with pastry and trim the edges.

Cut a 1 cm / 0.4" wide ribbon and seal around the edges, pressing with a fork to form a decorative pattern.

Cover and leave to sit for 10 minutes so the pastry can relax.

Glaze the pie with remaining egg wash and bake on high heat (220°C / 430°F) full fan for about 15 minutes, or until pastry is nut brown and thoroughly cooked.

Turn oven down to 180°C / 350°F and cook for a further 5 – 8 minutes.

To serve

Serve a slice of pie with baked seasonal vegetables. ■

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