NEW TARGETS AND REACHING NEW TARGETS

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Rhonda and I farm on the Southland Plains where we run approximately 700 hinds, a Velvet herd, and carry all progeny through to at least one year of age Bull beef production and some cropping is also carried out

Our New Zealand deer, especially with the introduction of improved and different genetics, have a great potential to grow fast in their first year The challenge to us as farmers is to provide our deer with improved nutrition, so we can economically harness this potential I would like to give you two examples over two successive years to compare, where we succeeded and where we failed to reach our targets

In 1994, once we weaned our fawns, we encountered many problems and they were

(a) wet weather over weaning meant our fawns didn't settle so well,
(b) we were using a white drench to control internal parasites, and because the second drench after weaning was a week late, lungworm developed with associated pneumonia problems in some animals,
(c) poor swede crops resulted in us bringing the hinds off the swedes at the end of July, three weeks earlier than planned,
(d) we also had a very cold, wet, late Spring with very slow grass growth

As you can see, our problems just compounded through poor animal health management, severe adverse climatic conditions and reduced winter feed crops Our animals were only well fed in early winter and from November onwards

Now the good year! In 1995 we had settled weather over weaning A dry, early Autumn restricted grass supply, but with the strategic use of Nitrogen and improved stock management by restricting adult animals on limited areas with silage supplements, we were able to go into the winter with good grass supplies We also had extra areas of swedes and crops were generally good Also our animal health programme, with the use of "Vetdectin Pour-On" prevented lungworm problems developing

All this resulted in our hind fawns being well fed on swede tops from May until the end of July Our stag fawns were well wintered in grass - in a mob of 300, they were shifted every 3 to 4 days, onto 4 hectares of fresh grass approximately 100 mm in height They took the top off it and moved on Once again we had a late wet Spring, but with some of our hinds still on swedes until

late September, we did not have a Spring feed shortage and our young deer were well fed right through until the summer or until they were killed

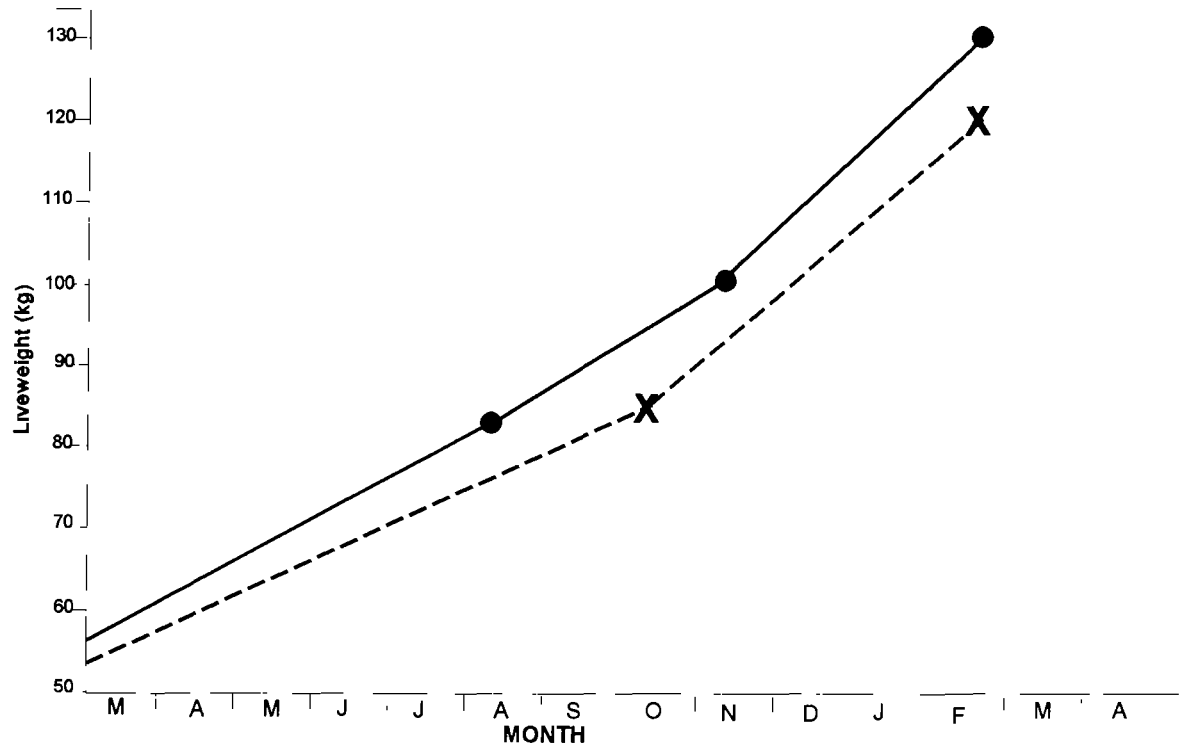

Figure 1 *Body weights of red deer stags from weaning to 14 months*

1994 1995

The effect on red stag growth rates of the two seasons are shown in Figure 1 The red stag fawns are of similar parentage The 82 kg average liveweight of red stags in mid-October 1994 is the poorest I have ever had When we were able to feed them on good quality feed, they grew well, but never reached the expected target liveweights in the Autumn Much improved growth rates were achieved in 1995 with 100 kg average on November 1 If we wanted to, we could kill most animals before Christmas above 50 kg carcass weight at the higher schedules

The hybrid results are even more dramatic (see Figure 2) In 1994 there were a very limited number of hybrid stags from one sire, while the 1995 data shows the results from progeny of six sires and much larger numbers Because of the limited numbers in the first year, the results are not truly scientifically accurate, but still worth presenting The 91 kg weight in mid-October is not much better than the red spikers in the same year In 1995 the 97 kg weight in August and the 117

kg calculated average on 1 November are much improved The November weight is by extrapolation, as we started killing the heavier hybrid stags in September at 58 kg carcass weight

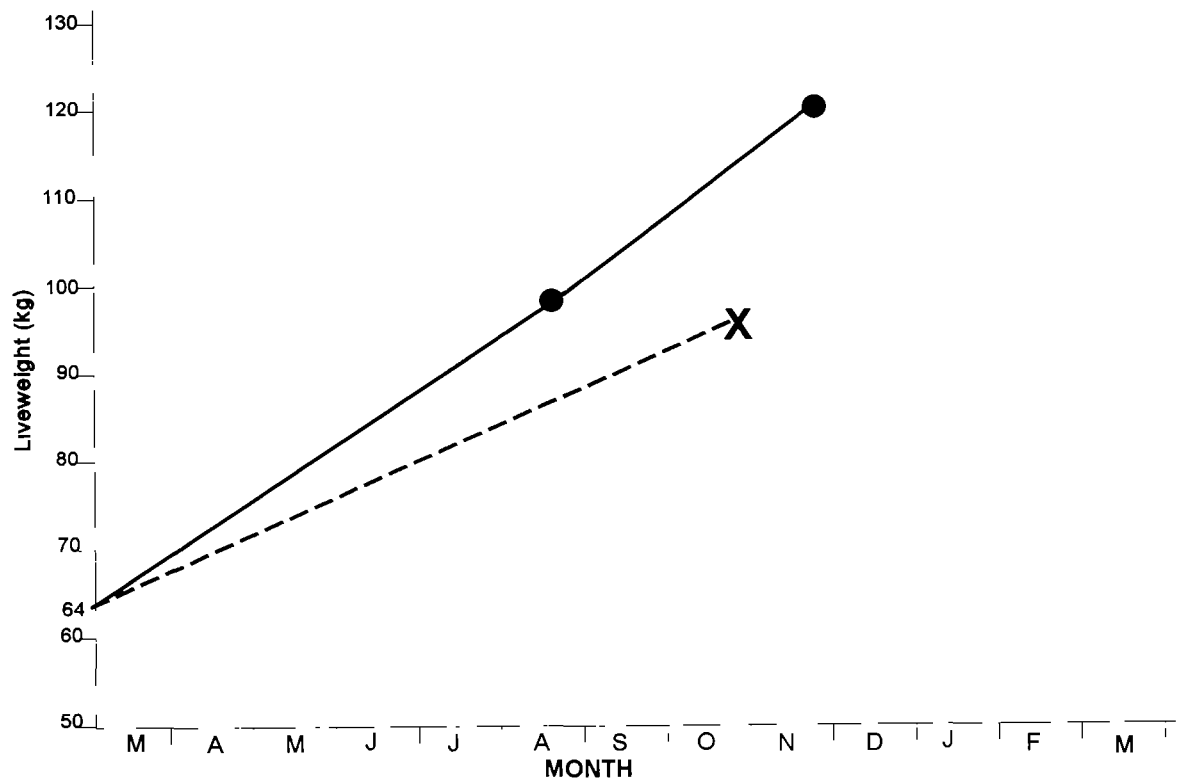

Figure 2 *Bodyweights of hybrid stags*

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If one now looks at the traditional schedule trends with the high peak from August to November and then falling $1-1 50/kg by February/March, the economic advantages to early fast growth rates are very real

SUMMARY

To gain top growth rates in our yearling deer, it is very important to have a good supply of quality Autumn, Winter and early Spring nutrition On our farm this requires a combination of good animal health management, top stock management, generous supplies of winter feed supplements, top pastures, and the use of nitrogen to overcome possible feed deficits Our target of economically improving our fawn growth rates has been achieved Could the potential in the future be another 30-40% increase in weight gains by adopting other technology and strategies?