

## Farming - an endurance test

The car bumper sticker said 'God doesn't ask more than you can endure'.

Well I have to tell you Huey, you are getting pretty close!!

Depending where you live, it has been too dry, too wet or B#+\*! freezing.

Add to that poor returns for lamb-sheep meat over the past two seasons and all in all it has certainly been an endurance test.

In my opinion, this situation has really exposed the weakness in our own internal

meat marketing systems which have been well publicised.

If the initiatives being considered at the moment are (hopefully) adopted it will enable the industry to market on a co-ordinated, orderly front, to stop under selling at the market face.

I believe the culture and practises of the large co-ops and companies are archaic (real dinosaurs) and they need to change quickly. These old ingrained attitudes have no place in modern day businesses.

## Parasite resistant gene

The recent discovery of the gene in sheep responsible for parasite resistance will have a huge impact for sheep farmers.

Research shows that parasite resistant animals will carry one or two copies of the gene. SIL will soon be able to produce a parasite index based on one, two or no copies present in an animal. We plan to have that available to clients at selling 2008.

We are extremely well placed to take advantage of new genetic technology as 2300 of our 3150 performance recorded ewes are DNA ID and all ewes will be DNA ID by 2009.



## Inner value carcass evaluation — invermay

In early March, the top 33 St Leger Romney ram hoggets chosen on SIL Dual Purpose index and ultra sound eye muscle scan were sent to Invermay Agricultural Centre, near Dunedin. This is the only facility available in NZ for CT scanning sheep.

Inner Value is a CT scanning protocol that measures the weights of the muscle and fat in the hind leg; loin and shoulder meat cuts. This enables those using Inner Value to take genetic improvement to a new level by ranking animals on the basis of value of meat in each cut. It is estimated that this method of Ultrasound scanning + CT scanning doubles the rate of genetic progress compared to ultrasonic scanning alone.

Using this technology we can now

evaluate St Leger rams for the true value of carcass cuts and select for mating the sires best suited to produce meat cuts to specification. Previously such accurate information could only be gathered by dissecting a carcass, and they are not much good for breeding after that!!

Yield based grading will create strong demand for rams with this information.

I believe we will have all the benefits of the dual purpose breed, with progeny that will grade like a terminal sired animal.

On return, three of the 33 rams showed the effects of the long journey, and were unable to be used, but I guess that gives a useful insight to an individual's constitution also! The others recovered quickly and performed well.



St Leger rams undergoing CT scanning



## Facial eczema new breed mix *romney x coopworth*

Facial Eczema reared its ugly head in many parts of the East Coast in late autumn causing sub-clinical to moderate damage to a lot of flocks.

Last newsletter I introduced our new breed mix, which we nicknamed the F.E. BUSTERS (Well other ram breeders seem to have a flash name for everything on four legs!!)

Once they were on the ground we were dying to know what level of resistance had been acquired by mating St Leger Romneys with David Hartle's high performing FE resistant Coopworths. So we whistled up Trevor Cook - Consultant Veterinarian to test a sample of the progeny.

The test group was administered 0.25mg/kg Sporidesmin - the dose is determined by Ruakura. Because St Leger had no previous history of FE testing, the challenge was limited to a starting level for humane reasons, but high enough to show inherent protection. No animals showed any photosensitivity or physical signs and the blood test results showed those tested had a significant level of protection.

Higher dose testing will continue, to confirm higher levels of protection. However as anticipated these results showed this lamb population had a strong starting point for breeding very FE tolerant stock.

### But wait – there's more...

While we are confident the Romney-Coopworth cross rams available now will tolerate moderate to severe FE challenges, we are going to use the female progeny of the Romney-Coopworth cross and mate them to high performing highly FE resistant Coopworth Rams.

We expect the resulting 1/4 Romney X 3/4 Coopworth cross will be pretty well bomb proof and still have all the other desirable genetic traits. These will be available as Ram Hoggets March 2009

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# Nil dosing policy

This is our third year of NIL dosing of mixed age ewes.

We have not long completed a comprehensive FEC test on the mixed age flock which showed a very low infestation of parasite. The dry year also had us on the alert for liver fluke infestation, but testing showed there was no problem.

# Prices to suit the times

As a way of acknowledging the loyalty and support of our clients and recognizing that everyone is feeling the pinch after two very difficult seasons (weather and market forces), at this season's ram selling – for every 10 commercial rams purchased only nine will be invoiced.

For those clients who purchase less than 10 rams, there will be no charge for one of your selected rams.

This is a "one off" this year only as we are sure you will understand that St Leger's commitment to keeping abreast of, and adapting to, new technology comes at a cost.

# Home team news

We farewelled shepherd Andrew Savage in July, he has been lured away by high country mustering to The Muller Station near Molesworth. We wish him well. Kory Proctor from Marton has taken Andrew's position and he came to us from a stint on a cattle ranch in Alberta, Canada.

Stock manager Matthew and his wife Jess are expecting a little brother or sister for Helen on November 5.

I'll leave you with a little tale about survival – two mice were scouting around a pantry and they fell into a bowl of cream. Both mice were swimming frantically - unable to climb the smooth bowl rim. The first mouse tired, and seeing no way out, gave up trying and drowned. The second mouse was determined to survive and he swam round and round the bowl. The cream eventually turned to butter and the mouse was able to climb out of the bowl and lived to carry out business another day.

I look forward to talking to you soon.

**RICK**