

Deer Industry News

Coping with Covid



Retail Therapy
MARKETERS PIVOT TO RETAIL CHANNELS AS FOODSERVICE TAKES A HIT

Innovation Shift
NEW DEER RESEARCH MODEL FOCUSING ON COLLABORATION AND DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS

Life in Lockdown
FARM LIFE CHANGED LITTLE, BUT OTHER PARTS OF INDUSTRY FELT BIGGER IMPACT

Deer Industry News

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Cover: Fortunately it was only people, not animals, that had to socially distance during Alert Levels 4, 3 and 2. In this issue we look at the impacts of the Covid-19 response on everyone from on farm (not much) to our overseas markets (somewhat more), and how we're rising to the challenge.

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EDITOR Phil Stewart, Words & Pictures

Our model is unique

As I prepare to farewell my DINZ board colleagues this month, this seems a good time to reflect on the work of the Board and the developments we have seen over the past nine years.



Danny Hailes.

THE DINZ BOARD model is unique in New Zealand in that members are variously appointed by venison producers, velvet growers and also marketers and processors. On similar industry boards, you will find most of the make-up is either farmers or processors – but all aspects of the deer sector are well-represented around the DINZ board table.

With essentially just five venison marketers/export processors for the New Zealand deer industry, DINZ is able to work closely with producers. The good two-way communication helps with progressing development initiatives.

One of the strengths of our governance model is that we keep close to our constituents. This is particularly important during the current challenging times, when resilience is critical.

DINZ is funded equally by producers and processors/marketers. The board makes a point of getting out several times a year to meet with venison and velvet producers around the regions. That gives producers opportunities to hear first hand what we are planning and for them to give us feedback and, importantly, tell us how they think we should be best spending their levy money to promote and grow the industry.

I have seen much change in the industry during my time on the board, such as the launch of the Passion2Profit Primary Growth Partnership (PGP). This included the successful Advance Parties initiative, which has been something of a trailblazing model for the wider red meat sector. That connectivity, sharing of ideas and support among farmers has been instrumental in supporting progress and growth in recent years and will be valuable during the current challenges.

We have also seen the launch of the deer progeny test and worked to support the production of heavier deer, available earlier in the season, to support the valuable chilled markets. In recent years, while deer numbers have fallen, the weights of individual deer have materially improved and annual export tonnage of velvet has increased.

We have also diversified our markets. When I joined the board, venison export were mainly going to Germany and other Northern European markets. This has grown to other markets including Asia and North America and lower-value cuts being used in gourmet pet foods.

Indeed, it is in North America where we are now seeing initial positive signs for venison following major disruption to the foodservice sector by Covid-19. The medium- and long-term future for venison is bright.

Finally, I must mention the very good people I have worked with. There have been some great characters. We've seen the board membership evolve but always enjoyed good representation of skills and experience. I have worked with, among others, farmers, scientists, marketers, salespeople, processors, merchant bankers and people with extensive offshore in-market experience. Every member brings a unique approach and, as someone leaves, we have been very fortunate to have them replaced by someone equally capable. It has been a great pleasure and a privilege to be a part of that DINZ journey over almost a decade. ■

– Danny Hailes, General Manager Livestock and Shareholder Services, Alliance Group

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Weaner market system: Is there a better way?

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

We're in this together. That's an expression we've heard a lot during the Covid-19 pandemic. But it could be equally applied to the uncertainty that's bedevilled the trade in weaner deer and venison export markets in 2020.

WHEN THE RESTAURANT trade in all our markets closed in March, as governments attempted to contain the Covid-19 pandemic, venison importers were in no position to provide their New Zealand suppliers with any forward guidance on possible demand later in the year. Their own businesses had been shut down virtually overnight. Consequently, chilled orders for summer programmes were immediately cancelled and they postponed discussions on orders for delivery later in the year. Finishers in the market for weaner deer were, for a period of time, unable to get a gauge from venison companies what the spring schedule might be. As companies have provided further guidance, the market has resumed and weaners are being traded, although not at prices that breeders can operate at.



For a time, finishers were unable to get a gauge on likely schedule prices. Photo: Richard Hilson.

Venison marketer perspective

After a month of uncertainty **Silver Fern Farms** moved first to provide suppliers with guidance on where the bottom of the venison market might be with their 'Market Recovery Plan', announced on 11 May. Under this plan, suppliers will receive a guaranteed \$5/kg "processing payment" within 14 days of processing, as had already been happening. A second top-up payment will be "at risk" and subject to the final sale price received for a supplier's venison products. This represented a \$2 drop in the schedule at the time of announcement, but also provides a floor price. SFF said in its letter to suppliers that this model was a balanced way for it and suppliers to navigate future demand "without compromising the need to maintain processing continuity". Although there is no guarantee of a top-up payment, there is no cap on any such payment should conditions allow.

Latest indications from Silver Fern Farms are that top up pricing is likely to range between \$6.50 to \$8.00 on future production. But that comes with the caveat that volumes for this season's chilled programmes are still being worked on.

Alliance Group also provided some certainty by announcing a contract incorporating a schedule range for venison for the remainder of the year. (At the time of the announcement the Alliance SI schedule was \$5.90 for an AP stag under 3 years.)

The Alliance South Island contract is for a minimum \$6/kg (for AP stag under 3 years) and applies from 29 June to 23 December. It allows for quarterly payments to be made if the schedule is above \$6.00, based on weight at time of kill. The offer is capped at \$8.

Volume contracted is capped at 50 percent of the average total supply for the offer period based on the past 2 years' supply. The supplier is required to supply 100 percent of their deer volumes and any other species processed to Alliance, and the minimum number to qualify for the contract is 50.

Andy Duncan, CEO of **Duncan NZ Ltd** said the short term was likely to be "a bit messy" so now was probably not the time to be trying to formulate medium-to-long-term on-farm strategies. "It's still day-to-day until we see what form the post-Covid venison markets look like, but there are consumers out there who know how good our product is, so our goal is to find new ways to get it to them, thereby lessening reliance on the restaurant sector."



Andy Duncan: Looking to find new ways to reach consumers.

In a letter to suppliers on 13 May, Duncan noted that one key factor in the resumption of venison markets was customer demand, but another was the state of the supply chain. "When restaurants closed in late March, all product in this distribution pipeline had to stay in cold storage. As demand slowly returns, this in store product will be first in line for consumption, so some delay in placing new orders is inevitable."

He added that the impact of Covid-19 on the venison market was a short-term problem, but Duncan NZ was adapting as quickly as possible to develop new channels to reach consumers.

Gerard Hickey, managing director of **Firstlight Foods**, was about to embark on a series of farmer meetings when he spoke

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Weaner market: continued

to *Deer Industry News*. “We won’t be setting forward prices but we will be laying out best and worst-case scenarios. We’d advise suppliers to budget for the worst case and then hopefully they should be in for a pleasant surprise later on.”

Hickey said that as of late May their retail and online sales were going fine and even in the foodservice sector orders were starting to appear again. “I feel as though the rock bottom stage is behind us.”

He said young deer were being bought on schedule thus far, although options for cull hinds were more limited. That said, the chilled season was a way off and he advised farmers to keep planning as normal and not rush into anything.

Mountain River Venison director John Sadler admitted there’s no sugar-coating the short-term situation for the company’s markets. “We’re communicating regularly with our suppliers; the foodservice sector we supply is ranging from extremely quiet to dead. The general view is that sales in the coming season will be 40–60 percent of normal.”

He said even before the Covid-19 pandemic, venison was facing increasing competition from other proteins in their markets. “Now that effect has been amplified – the market is hugely disrupted.”

Sadler said switching focus to retail channels could only work to a point. “Success in retail requires long-term commitment and can only absorb so much. We need to avoid creating new problems.”

Foodservice was still the best target for high-value venison, he said. At present demand in the United States was down by up to 95 percent, while in Germany it was more like 50 percent. “The situation in China is a bit more optimistic – we’re starting to see some restaurants reopening there.”

Production in the company’s plant had slowed in March, with capacity cut back as distancing measures were put in place. That has led to some pressure of stock coming through but for now the lower capacity is being maintained. Unfortunately that has led to some job losses.

One logistical issue for Mountain River has been the dramatic dropoff in airfreight capacity for exports of high-value venison cuts. Airfreight only accounts for about 5–10 percent of the company’s normal export traffic but this further disruption is unwelcome.

Sadler said that while the focus in the short term is survival, the



Gerard Hickey: Rock bottom stage is behind us.



John Sadler: Sales likely to be 40–60 percent of normal.

industry should be looking strategically, beyond the immediate crisis. “There are still opportunities in the foodservice sector and we’ll be doing our best to take those up. Foodservice is where the real value is, and the whole deer industry needs it to thrive.”

Perfect storm for farmers – climate and Covid

When you talk to any deer farmer about the weaner market in 2020, the term “perfect storm” comes up a lot – and with good reason. Following several years of stable, solid prices, increasing carcass weights and signs of a recovery in breeding herd numbers, the venison industry developed some serious wobbles this year.

First, there’s been the weather. Usually, if it’s dry in one region there is feed or grazing somewhere else. That hasn’t happened this year. Most of the North Island and large tracts of the South Island had a difficult summer and autumn. They are going into winter well short of feed, although recent rains will help. In most cases the problem has been drought, but in Southland it was too wet and too cold.



As rains returned after prolonged drought, deer farmers throughout the country were looking forward to seeing some greener swards like this.

Then there has been Covid-19, which has affected livestock industries around the world in multiple ways. For example in the United States up to 10 million pigs will be euthanased and not processed as the staff of large meat packing plants are ravaged by the virus and there’s nowhere for the animals to go.

Fortunately for venison, any shortages of killing space due to Covid-19 were temporary (see article page 10).

And because of lockdown, the three major weaner sales this year (Taihape in the North Island, and High Peak and Mount Arrowsmith in the South Island) were cancelled. These sales account for only a few thousand weaners between them, but they do set benchmarks for trade in weaners outside the auction ring.

South Canterbury breeder and finisher **Kris Orange** said in the South Island the first weaners sold straight off mum in early March were going for about \$5/kg liveweight. “This was a bit down on last year, but sellers were still pretty happy.”

Things quickly went south from there as the impact of Covid-19 and feed shortages began to take their toll, with mixed-sex prices down to about \$4 by the end of March and falling further since then. When *Deer Industry News* spoke to Orange in late May, post-rut weaned animals were going for \$3.00–\$3.50/kg. (Other reports put prices at \$2.50.)

He said the dry conditions in North Canterbury and a lack of killing space had compounded problems, with people electing to take fewer weaners than usual. "A lot of pregnant hinds are being sent to the works to make room for retained weaners that would otherwise have been sold store. That's a real shame," Orange said.

He said the trade in weaners in the South Island had slowed, with many breeders opting to hang onto weaners rather than sell at unsustainable prices. (Since these comments the post-rut market in weaners has continued to operate, with breeders relieved to be able to sell weaners, albeit at lower prices.) Orange considers himself fortunate to have been able to make plenty of good baleage. "We certainly won't be poking high-cost feed into them this year." He added that feed prices in the region were high: baleage was over \$100 a bale and palm kernel was \$400/tonne, up from the usual \$250-\$300.



Kris Orange: Lack of killing space compounded problems for some.

Mandy and Jerry Bell, of Criffel Station near Wanaka, buy large numbers of weaners for finishing each year. In Mandy's opinion the system for capturing value fairly for breeders, finishers and processors throughout the chain is "broken". Mandy Bell said the dramatic impact of Covid-19 on the venison market this year exposed inherent defects in a system that can arbitrarily reward or punish people when venison markets fluctuate.



Mandy Bell wants a better model for risk sharing throughout the production chain.

She's not happy with the status quo and is putting pressure on all parties – and that includes agents – to get around the table and help develop mechanisms that will fairly share both risk and reward. And while there has been some progress towards setting up better risk sharing between breeders and finishers – Kris Orange developed a model several years ago that is used by some – Bell said the venison processing and marketing companies must be part of the mix.

Bell said Alliance Group's move gave an important market signal. "It has provided the opportunity to have discussions with breeders and allow sharing of the upside, which we all hope will be the case."

Weaners kept in good nick

Andrew and Pam Peters, who farm near Taihape, are well known for the quality of the weaners they present at the annual Taihape weaner fair. Andrew Peters said they reflect a combination of

good genetics and good feeding. In addition all are drenched and vaccinated for leptospirosis and yersinia. "They hit the ground running."

With the cancellation of the April Taihape weaner fair this year, they were forced to hang onto the 280 weaner stags and 200 hinds much longer than they wanted to, and during a serious drought. Peters said that given the climate and market conditions, interest from private buyers wasn't strong, and both agents and prospective purchasers were trying to force prices down to get a sale.

The couple worked hard to keep their weaners in good shape as the cancelled sale date rolled past, and talked to a lot of people around the country to get a better feel for the market. Keeping the weaners longer meant they got through 120 bales of baleage and 10 tonnes of maize. "They were still putting on 1-2kg a week and my top line was 70kg on average."

They ended up getting more than \$4.00/kg for the weaners sold, with hinds realising between \$0.50-\$1.00 less than the stags. Last year they were averaging \$6 across both sexes. "I probably did better than some," Peters said.

Rather than getting rid of capital stock to make room for his overstaying weaners, Peters deer fenced an extra 30 hectares, something that will be useful in the long term also.

Overall, the market was variable, Peters said. In general, weaners sold in the area have realised between about \$3.50-\$4.50/kg. Another local breeder managed to sell all of their weaner stags but has kept all the hinds as part of a planned expansion – a good sign. On the other hand, one finisher decided not to buy any store deer this year and stocked up with lambs instead.



Andrew Peters cast the net wide to get a feel for the weaner market.

Finisher drops numbers

An eastern North Island finisher, who preferred not to be named, was dropping back their weaner purchasing by nearly 30 percent this year, thanks to the uncertainty in the market. While they were fortunate to have avoided the worst of the drought, they were not confident that a decent margin would be available this year for finishing, so have upped beef numbers instead.

The finisher said the cancellation of the auctions may have done sellers a favour, due to both the uncertainty in the market and the drought in many areas where deer are generally finished. Although wanting to limit their own level of risk this year, they are concerned for the industry. In particular they are worried that breeders forced to hang onto their weaners and trying to finish them in favour of other stock classes might end up taking too long to get them ready, miss the chilled peak and end up losing confidence in deer.

King Country-based **Sean de Lacy**, who is an agent and also farms deer, said generally the heavier weaners had been sold this year, with breeders hanging on to

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Weaner market: continued

lighter stock. He believes some will struggle to finish deer this year and, like others, thinks hinds are being culled to make room for retained weaners.

de Lacy had been struggling to sell his own terminal weaners, but was still hoping to offload about half. One thing that would help send the right market signals is a bigger margin between young stock and cull hinds, he said, adding that other companies seemed to be taking a similar approach to Silver Fern Farms' Market Recovery Plan.

"There are some good stock around to be had, but time is tight. People need to make their decisions early."

Mandy Bell agrees. When she discussing systemic problems with Alliance she urged them to act proactively and talk to their suppliers. She also urged DINZ to collaborate with the key stakeholders, share messaging and not leave it for the market to define the outcome. This, she believes, would help prevent too many hinds being culled and provide some confidence. "Culling hinds or changing policy to finishing beef is not positive for our industry."

Bell talked to 13 potential suppliers of weaners for their own finishing operation. "Following the support of Alliance with a spring price indication, I was interested in a shared risk arrangement, where we could both share the upside if prices improve." Of those 13, just three breeders were prepared to enter into an agreement that shared risk and reward.

At least it was a start, and she's grateful that the \$6-\$8 framework provided by Alliance provided at least some sort of

platform for negotiation.

Bell wants breeders to get a better handle on their true costs of production so that better, more transparent agreements can be made

She'd also like agents to shape up and work to a set of industry standards. "Some are good, but not all."

Bell believes the current disruptions to the world economy and the deer industry's markets provide an ideal opportunity for a complete rethink of the breeder-finisher-processor model. She is, above all, an optimist. ■



Weaners at Criffel Station.

2020 Virtual Deer Industry Conference

Three separate update sessions, 1.00pm on 30 June, 7 July and 14 July 2020

WE MAY HAVE missed out on our traditional face-to-face Deer Industry Conference this year, but the regular updates will still be available. The biggest difference is that you'll be able to tune in to watch from the comfort of home and the presentations will be split over separate sessions.

The series of on-line sessions runs on three successive Tuesdays, starting 30 June. The DINZ Executive team will report on activity for the year in short presentations, with time made available for Q&A. Sarah Perriam will direct proceedings as MC.

With running times of only 50-80 minutes, you should be able to easily fit each session in with the rest of your working day, but if you can't watch them live, the presentations and discussions will also be recorded and hosted on the DINZ website for viewing at any time.

To join the presentations: www.deernz.org/2020conference ■

30 June

1.00pm	Ian Walker: State of the Nation
1.10pm	Ian and Sarah Q+A
1.20pm	Session ends
1.20pm	Innes Moffat: The DINZ Year
1.30pm	Innes and Sarah Q+A
1.39pm	Session ends
1.40pm	Tony Pearse: NZDFA
1.50pm	Tony and Sarah Q+A
1.59pm	Session ends

2.00pm	Science: Carla
2.10pm	Jamie Ward/Sharon McIntyre Q+A
2.20pm	Session ends

7 July

1.00pm	Lindsay Fung: Environment
1.10pm	Lindsay and Sarah Q+A
1.20pm	Deer Industry Environment Groups
1.24pm	Session ends
1.25pm	Rhys Griffiths: Velvet Marketing
1.35pm	Tony Cochrane, Ross Chambers, Colin Stevenson Q+A
1.44pm	Session ends
1.45pm	Phil McKenzie: Passion2Profit
1.50pm	Innovation Group
1.55pm	Rural Professionals
2.00pm	Sarah Q+A
2.10pm	Session ends

14 July

1.00pm	Science: Velvet composition
1.10pm	Steven Haines Q+A
1.19pm	Session ends
1.20pm	Nick Taylor: Venison
1.30pm	Nick and Sarah Q+A
1.35pm	Venison marketers Q+A
1.50pm	Session ends

China re-opening “great news”

A catalogue of approved animal species for human consumption has been issued by the Peoples Republic of China. It includes venison from farmed malu – the Chinese name for red deer – along with more traditional farm animals and poultry.

DINZ CHIEF EXECUTIVE Innes Moffat says the inclusion of our deer is great news for venison producers and marketers, as it will make it clear to officials across China that the sale and consumption of our venison is legal and safe for Chinese consumers.

“Chinese consumers have a growing appreciation for quality animal proteins, making China an increasingly important market for our venison. It was taking about 10 percent of our exports until the end of 2019,” he says.

“When it became clear that the Covid-19 virus had jumped the species barrier from wild animals, China clamped down on illegal sales of wild animal meat. Although our venison comes from farmed deer, this put a virtual halt to our exports there. Given that deer are still widely seen as wild animals, it’s easy to see how some regional and border officials might have become uncertain about the legality of our farmed venison.”

Moffat thanks officials in China’s Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs for being so responsive to the industry’s requests for the status of New Zealand farmed venison to be clarified.

“The news is timely. China has seen a dramatic slowing of the incidence of Covid-19, to the point where Wuhan, the source of the pandemic, is reporting no new cases. Restaurants in many regions are reopening, but with social distancing. It’s a good time for us to be selling our delicious venison there,” he says.

“Restaurants in some of our other main markets are also reopening before they have fully eliminated Covid-19. How consumers will respond to this situation is unclear, which means there is less certainty about when trade will recover to previous levels.”

China’s official catalogue of animals approved for human consumption names three deer species – malu (*Cervus elaphus*), sika and reindeer. In its *Journal of Livestock and Genetic Resources*, venison from NZ malu is the only imported red deer variety listed.

Importantly, says Moffat, deer are being treated by China the same as other livestock raised for meat. Some other species are permitted to be used only for traditional Chinese medicines, or for only their fur, not as food. ■



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Looking to NZ retail for venison sales

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

With foodservice significantly affected around the globe, New Zealand venison processors were busy satisfying strong retail demand and developing their e-commerce offerings for Kiwis during lockdown Alert Levels three and four.

DUNCAN NZ CO-OWNER and manager of its home delivery service Vinnie Duncan explains that in a global market with barely a restaurant open due to Covid-19, there has been a shift towards direct sales to consumers across all high-end protein products.

“Whether this is through supermarkets or alternative outlets – online and retail – has depended on the supplier and how they have been set up at the time of going into lockdown,” she says, adding the company found itself diverting considerable product to direct consumer sales at short notice.

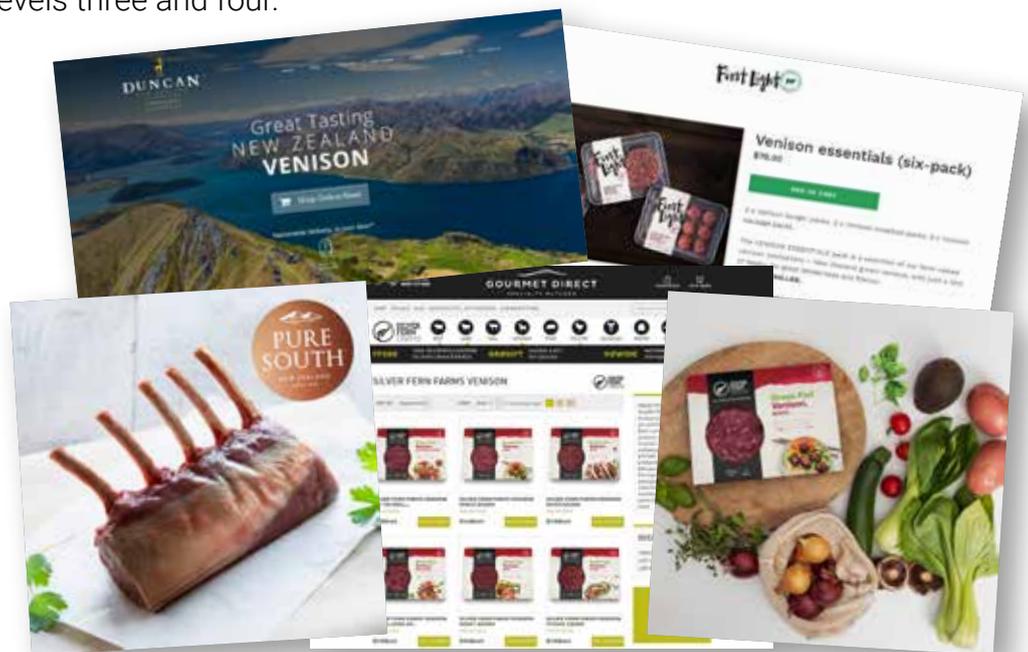
For First Light, retail (traditional grocery stores, its supply for MyFoodBag and its own online store) has been “the shining light,” reports the company’s chief executive Jason Ross.

“Like everyone, we have suffered from a lack of restaurant sales over the past two months. However, we have seen sales spikes through both retail channels and positive feedback from consumers, many of whom have told us they were not regular venison consumers previously,” he says.

Consumers have been staying home and creating delicious dishes in their own kitchens during lockdown, as they found themselves with extra time on their hands, explains Silver Fern Farms group marketing manager Nicola Johnston. Their venison products were already sold widely through New World and Countdown stores throughout New Zealand.

“They have been a popular choice for the health-conscious consumer providing a delicious source of iron and essential vitamins,” she says.

The week before lockdown was the highest week of sales in New Zealand grocery for the company’s retail venison range since it was launched in 2009. It was 20 percent higher than any other week of sales SFF had ever had. It drove a lift in sales of almost 30 percent in March, compared with the previous month. Johnston



Clockwise from top left: Duncan NZ’s Premium New Zealand Venison 4kg pack has been on offer in the North Island; First Light Venison’s retail range of venison meatballs, burgers and sausages has been in hot demand; Sales of Silver Fern Farms’ mince retail packs grew by 88 percent compared with last year; Silver Fern Farms venison is now available for Kiwis through online speciality butcher Gourmet Direct; orders have been running hot at Alliance’s online Pure South Shop.

says this is because the products are conveniently vacuum packed to give a long shelf life and to keep well in the freezer, which made them ideal for the lockdown period.

Developing online infrastructure

Thanks to investment by exporters in building new infrastructure, New Zealand consumers have been able to make contactless purchases of venison from a variety of new online sources, in addition to the regular supermarket shelves.

Doing things differently has been key for Duncan NZ. Its venison has been available online through www.duncan-nz.com, through the online platform Container Door and it has also been promoting Duncan Venison alongside a wider family concern, Duncan Beer (www.duncansbrewing.co.nz), Vinnie Duncan says.

Alliance Group’s online food delivery channel www.puresouthshop.com was promoted widely on social media and has grown significantly due to the Covid-19 restrictions, Shane Kingston, General Manager Sales says.

“With the foodservice sector heavily impacted by Covid-19, we diverted members of our team into the e-commerce and digital

marketing areas and accelerated previously planned investment in the Pure South online store.”

For First Light, while meat and manufacturing capacity have not been a restraint, the company had to react quickly and invest in on-line sales infrastructure and capability for its **www.firstlight.farm** e-shop, says Ross.

Silver Fern Farms launched a new partnership in mid-May with Gourmet Direct (**www.gourmetdirect.co.nz**), a nationwide e-commerce business specialising in premium New Zealand meat products. They were thrilled to partner with the company: “It was a natural fit,” says Johnston.

“They have a loyal customer base which values their selection of premium meats, product quality and superior customer service. By joining forces with them, we can bring our farmers’ world-class meat products to more Kiwis’ plates.”

Pressure on infrastructure

However, it wasn’t all plain sailing. The massive increase in online shopping across all of fast-moving consumer goods and then contactless requirements meant courier delivery and infrastructure came under huge pressure, Duncan notes.

“All companies with any retail presence saw a substantial increase in online sales. However this was nowhere near compensating for the reduction as a result of foodservice closure, and all this product had to be delivered, contactless, to home addresses,” she says.

Overall, courier companies were not ready for this and did not have the capability nationwide to deliver chilled or frozen product to all addresses, especially those in rural areas, in a seamless and timely fashion. However, Duncan NZ’s customers were generally very understanding of the situation, she says.

For beef processor Greenlea Premier Meats, which added First Light Venison to its online offering at **www.greenleabutchershop.co.nz** last year, demand quickly outstripped capacity and it was all hands on deck to pick, pack and ship, says business development manager Julie McDade. Even managing director Tony Egan was brought in to pack on some of the busier days, she reveals.

McDade reports Greenlea’s online sales for venison, Ovation lamb and its own beef products have been well up on average daily order totals pre-Covid: “It was the silver lining in the pandemic.”

During the height of the panic-buying, sales were up 600 percent, with traffic on the website increasing by 2,000 percent, she says. “It has now settled into a ‘new normal’ which is still quadruple a pre-Covid day (based on order numbers). Five to 10 percent of that is venison.”

Early in Level 4, the Hamilton-based company realised it couldn’t cope with the increased demand and it had to limit the number of orders each day. They managed to employ a few part-time workers who had lost their jobs during lockdown and the couriers kept up with the extra work, getting everything to where it needed to go with minimal issues and no disruption to service, says McDade.

So what’s been popular?

Convenience products – mince, diced and stir-fry – have all been popular, but New Zealand’s e-shoppers have also been trying the less common retail cuts.



It was all hands on deck at the Greenlea Butcher Shop with Managing Director Tony Egan even being drafted in to help pick, pack and ship product, says Julie McDade (left).

Duncan NZ reports a steady demand for high-quality protein items that are not readily available in the supermarket. This was also the case at the Pure South Shop, where venison racks, loins and fillets were popular options, according to Kingston.

Silver Fern Farms reports an increase of 88 percent over the same time last year for its Venison Mince pack and 78 percent for its Venison Steaks. At First Light, domestic sales were up 50 percent across all products, but similarly to Greenlea, it was the lower value convenience items that had the greatest demand, says Ross.

“This is a positive as it is the lower cost, more familiar items such as burgers and sausages that are the natural entry point into venison consumption.”

Is this the “new normal”?

All agree that a “new normal” is emerging. McDade points to the 2003 SARS outbreak in China, which launched that country’s tremendous growth in online shopping.

“The demand and use of online has only grown from that point to where it dominates the retail space now. New Zealanders have been slow to adapt to e-commerce – certainly percentages are well below the rest of the developed world – but this situation has forced them to try new things,” she says.

“Based on the feedback we’ve received, I think many were sceptical of using online, especially for perishable products, but they have been very pleased with the condition and quality of the product at delivery. ‘New normal’ for us looks a whole lot different than I thought it would six months ago.”

Duncan and Ross expect to see part of this new consumer shopping behaviour to continue as movement restrictions ease.

“We will only know to what extent as we head into winter and hopefully a more normal operating environment,” says Ross.

However, Shane Kingston reminds that: “There will always be a place for traditional bricks and mortar food retailers and we expect this to remain.” ■

Normality returning for venison processing

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Normality has almost returned for venison processing around the country, which was at Alert Level 2 at the time of writing, and with Level 1 beckoning.

WITH REPORTS OF meat processing plant closures and disruption to food chains overseas, thanks to Covid-19 outbreaks and deaths among workers, New Zealand seems to have coped well with the unprecedented conditions. Deemed essential businesses during the lockdown, despite the strain placed on business during the lockdown periods, all meat plants have generally kept rolling and workers were able to carry out their jobs safely.

Meat companies worked with tight new processing protocols in Level Four, which introduced health screening, tracking and tracing and physical distancing of 2 metres to maintain worker safety on site and when they go back to their homes and communities.

“It was pretty difficult because it required companies to reconfigure much of their typical production systems and initially saw a decrease in processing capacity throughput of 50 percent for sheepmeat and a 30 percent drop for beef,” says new Meat Industry Association chief executive Sirma Karapeeva.

Protocols had to be adjusted again for Level Three and then for Level Two. At that level, workers were required to be spaced one metre apart, but if they needed to work closer than that, they had to use personal protective equipment (PPE) such as face visors and screens.

Karapeeva says companies embraced the changes well and were looking for every opportunity to manage and increase capacity while keeping workers safe. They did this thanks to night shifts, working over weekends and over Easter and ANZAC Day.

DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat reports while the March venison slaughter was down slightly on the previous year, April’s was up. “This reflects the low-ish kill for April 2019 and the effort the venison companies have made to work through the Covid-19 restrictions to kill stock from farms affected by feed shortages.

“Venison processors are still operating under restrictions and some farmers will still be looking to get hinds off their farms quicker than they are able to, owing to the lack of booked-in space,” he says.

“Some farmers needed to get animals off the property because of feed shortages and companies have been willing to work with them get stock processed.”

Both Alliance Group and Silver Fern Farms initially had to reduce their venison processing capacity to about 80 percent of normal. By early May, Silver Fern Farms was operating at 90

percent and, at the time of writing, Alliance had been operating at 100 percent capacity for a couple of weeks, while Duncan NZ was operating at a little below its usual levels of 40–50 percent for the time of year.

“We were exceptionally lucky with the timing because deer slaughter numbers were naturally starting to reduce,” comments Simon Wishnowsky, chair of the venison processors technical committee and general manager of toll processor Venison Packers Feilding (VPF).

Like the rest of the industry, VPF effectively had 48 hours’ notice to come to terms, firstly, with the application process, and then a plan to remain open as an essential business within the agricultural sector.

“That was not a right, but a privilege,” he says, adding some staff elected to leave because of pre-existing medical conditions and other reasons.

Key to maintaining operations was VPF’s ability to meet the 2-metre social distancing requirements throughout the processing areas, smoko rooms and offices. That meant fewer people were required, so production was about 75 percent of normal.

There were also daily staff health checks and sign-in procedures along with a complete lockdown of the site and restricted access to associated providers who were also required to complete health declarations. Additional PPE was provided and staff awareness raised and monitored.

“We didn’t change anything under Level Three and continued to operate as per the Level Four guidelines,” says Wishnowsky, adding things relaxed a little further under Level Two.

“In the end we operated effectively. Morale and attendance was fantastic after getting over the initial shock and state of unknown.”

Speaking on behalf of the rest of the industry, Innes Moffat passed on their appreciation for a job well done in trying circumstances: “I would like to thank all of the venison processing workers in all of the companies for their hard work and commitment during the Covid-19 emergency to date,” he says.

With Level One beginning in June and venison markets around the world in various stages of opening, careful planning is already underway by the venison companies to cater for both short-term uncertainty and likely future demand (see page 8).



New Meat Industry Association chief executive, Sirma Karapeeva.



Simon Wishnowsky says staff morale and attendance was excellent at Venison Packers Feilding during lockdown.

Bank upbeat about venison prospects

Rabobank is optimistic about the ability of New Zealand's venison exports to bounce back after the market disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

IN A PODCAST last month, Rabobank animal proteins analyst Blake Holgate noted the good run enjoyed by venison exporters in recent seasons, including expansion into new markets in the United States and China. Sales in traditional markets, Germany and Belgium, had also been strong, he said.

"Many in the industry started this year with strong, resilient businesses and this will be important as the industry navigates what is now likely to be a challenging next 12 months following the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic," he said.

"The probability of a global recession is growing, along with a likelihood of a negative impact on consumer spending across all our markets. And for New Zealand venison producers, the magnitude of the fall in consumer spending and the speed and extent of recovery will be very important."

Acknowledging the severe impacts of the pandemic on the foodservice sector, Holgate expected the industry would begin to open up again as countries relaxed restrictions.

Despite the likelihood of considerably lower demand for venison in coming months, Holgate said sales of manufacturing venison and the European game season would help ensure a base level of demand.

"Venison sales to manufacturing remain stable and in coming months we expect demand for these products is likely to fare

better as more consumers are shopping and preparing meals in their own homes," he said.

"The well-entrenched game season in the northern hemisphere autumn remains an important sales window for New Zealand exporters and, at this stage, we anticipate the worst of the Covid-19 related disruptions may be behind us by then. However, given the high level of uncertainty currently facing European buyers, there has been a reluctance to commit to large forward orders of product."

Holgate said the diversification of New Zealand's venison markets would help the industry rebound, by providing the option to switch exports to markets that recover earliest. He added that if New Zealand continues to successfully contain the virus, this would enhance its reputation as a supplier of safe food. ■



Blake Holgate.

Processing: continued

Venison capacity increased at Lorneville

Venison processing capacity is being increased at the 18 month-old Alliance Lorneville plant near Invercargill, thanks to a further \$4 million investment by the co-operative, primarily to lift its beef processing capacity in the South Island.

Chief Executive David Surveyor says the investment, which will enable the facility to also process cull cows during the peak season from April to June, is a key part of the co-operative's beef growth strategy, recognising farmers' need for more beef capacity during peak season.

The new Lorneville plant was designed anticipating a potential need for more dairy cull cow processing in Southland, explains Alliance general manager livestock and shareholder services Danny Hailes. The new outlay will enable modification of the plant's processing chain and yards, principally to allow



David Surveyor says there will be additional capacity for venison processing at its Lorneville plant.

it to also take the larger animals, but it will also increase the throughput for deer.

"It will enable a material lift for venison production at the plant," says Hailes, adding the peak deer production season does not generally coincide with the dairy requirements. "During busy periods, we may process deer during the day and cull cows at night – washing down between species – and we also have the capability to go to multiple shift patterns, if required."

The co-operative will concentrate on putting the lighter cattle through Lorneville, while larger cull cows and prime beef cattle will be directed to the Alliance Matura beef plant, 50km away. ■



Alliance Lorneville's \$15.9 million venison processing plant was completed in 2018 and later opened by Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern.

Getting creative in lockdown

DINZ executive chef Graham Brown and consultant chef Shannon Campbell have been busy during lockdown coming up with appetising menu ideas for New Zealand venison to be used in forthcoming promotions. Here are just a few samples of their work to whet your appetite.



Working in a borrowed commercial kitchen and using professional lighting, Shannon Campbell has been focused on developing recipes for the current culinary trends for Levantine and Japanese food, along with some easy mince dishes and some more traditional German slow-cooked dishes for the game season. Here New Zealand venison has been presented as part of a hummus bowl.



Pelmeni, inspired by the Russian dumplings, another of Campbell's new dishes.

- www.nzvenison.com/chef-videos



Personal touch: Graham Brown seen here in a still from one of his latest videos, showing new recipes developed at home during lockdown for venison mince and steak cuts.



Another of Campbell's creations, New Zealand venison on the Turkish thin crust and crispy pizza Lahmacun.

Nigel Jones joins DINZ board

Nigel Jones, general manager strategy, Alliance Group, joins the DINZ board from 1 July as one of the board's four venison company appointees. He replaces Danny Hailes, who is stepping down after 9 years on the board.

Nigel joined Alliance Group in 2015 after 16 years in the primary sector including general manager roles such as strategy, supply chain and logistics for Fonterra. He has significant experience in business strategy and planning, marketing, key account management, procurement, supply chain and logistics and has worked in a range of international markets.

He is involved in The Omega Lamb Project Primary Growth Partnership (Te Mana Lamb). Nigel has Bachelor of Business degrees in accountancy and finance, a Master of Science in supply chain and logistics (Cranfield) and has completed an executive programme in strategy at Stanford University.

We will carry a fuller profile on Nigel Jones in our next issue. ■



New innovation model taking shape

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

DEEResearch and VARNZ are to be no longer – they are being replaced by an “Innovation Model”. It’s a prosaic name but it describes an important and fundamental shift in the way deer-related science is prioritised, implemented and assessed.

AND WHILE THE governance of deer research is changing, the research baby won’t be thrown out with the bathwater. As new proposals are put forward and considered, “legacy” research initiated under the old model continues. AgResearch’s ongoing high country water quality work is just one example. This and other work had funding allocated through DEEResearch’s previous Hitting Targets programme and they are continuing.

The biggest change is away from the highly structured, “top-down” model that was set up in the early 2000s, towards a more collaborative way to plan and manage the science. In fact the prefix “co-” crops up a lot in the conversation with DINZ science policy manager Catharine Sayer: co-design, co-innovation, co-implementation, co-operation.

“The DEEResearch and VARNZ structures served us well, but we need a more collaborative approach where beneficiaries of the research – farmers and processors for example – can sit down with the scientists to map out research directions and make sure the work gets properly applied and assessed,” she says.

“Farmers have become highly competent in managing deer over time and there is less pressure for the big research breakthroughs than there used to be. However, we are still required to invest in research and we need to do a better job of assessing the impact of the work and ensuring uptake.”

As we reported in the December 2019 *Deer Industry News*, research areas will be organised around four steering groups. Each has two co-leaders, one from AgResearch and the other from DINZ. The mix within each group will include scientists, farmers, veterinarians, processors and others, providing a diverse range of viewpoints and scrutiny.

Each group is expected to have between six and nine members many of whom will be new to industry groups which is actually a positive, according to Sayer. “They’ll be bringing in fresh thinking.”

The four steering groups and their co-leaders are:

STEERING GROUP	DINZ CO-LEADER	AGRESEARCH CO-LEADER
On-farm	Phil McKenzie	Geoff Asher
Post Farmgate	Nick Taylor/ Rhys Griffiths	Sue Zydenbos
Environment	Lindsay Fung	Richard Muirhead
Improved Breeding	Sharon McIntyre	Sheryl-Anne Newman



R1 stags at AgResearch Invermay. Photo: Jamie Ward.

The co-leaders for all four groups will meet quarterly after each steering group has met, to talk over common issues and ensure there’s consistency in the way they operate.

Sayer says it’s not always clear to people in the industry where research effort needs to go, but working within the steering groups will help them visualise the directions needed. “We won’t be investing in research that is out of kilter with the deer industry’s objectives. One underlying requirement will be that the work will help increase value.”

Some of the research will have quite long time horizons and groups will need to look at basic issues first, while seeing them also from an industry-wide perspective.

“A really important job for the steering groups will be looking at the whole lifecycle of a research project. Is this fundamental or applied research? What format should the outputs be in? How will it be implemented and how will the impacts of the work be monitored? These will be all key questions for the steering groups. Unfortunately, there is no manual providing the answers so each group will be encouraged to combine their wisdom to devise solutions tailored to the piece of work in question.”

The recently completed DEEResearch work on CARLA in deer will be a useful indicator for the way the innovation model will work (we hope to carry a report on this in the next issue of *Deer Industry News*). This research carried out at AgResearch Invermay

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Innovation: continued

is within the purview of the already-established Deer Industry Parasitology Group, whose success has provided a template for the innovation model.

The practical, measurable benefits of CARLA research should be clear to see as farmers work out how to leverage the new knowledge about the potential value of the CARLA gene to deer productivity. Members of the parasitology steering group insisted that the work be structured in a way that would make it easy for farmers to apply it, Sayer explains. She notes that Dave Lawrence, a vet and deer farmer, played a big role as a member of the parasitology group in helping shape the CARLA research outputs. Lawrence's contribution will continue through his membership of the Improved Breeding steering group.

The four steering groups will be managed by a joint DINZ–AgResearch team of Catharine Sayer and Jamie Ward (see below for more on Ward's role).

Ward is an excellent thinker who understands the connections between different science disciplines and can draw together various strands of work, Sayer adds. "He's good on detail, good at the high level, good with people and also has a good understanding of farm systems. He's worked across a lot of different areas in deer science so will be great to partner with leading these groups."

DINZ will provide a secretariat service to the steering groups, while AgResearch will contribute staff time in kind.

Sayer says the way the groups operate won't be prescriptive and while there will be an element of "suck it and see", there are already signs the groups are going to tackle the big questions and take a fresh approach.

"The Improved Breeding group has already met and carried out a good thought exercise to build a picture of the ideal type of animal to have in 20 years' time. So it's not just fine-tuning what's already being done – it will be far more than that."

The AgResearch angle

In many ways the Innovation Model for deer research puts a formal structure around a relationship that has already been developing, says AgResearch farm systems scientist, Jamie Ward.

Ward, who is jointly managing the four steering groups with DINZ's Catharine Sayer, says the two organisations have a long-established and collaborative research partnership. He hastens to add that the change in governance is no reflection on the former DEEResearch.

"They have worked well together and delivered some very good science to the deer industry. Their board brought some good people into the industry over the years." One example was Lincoln University's Andy Greer, the university representative on the former DEEResearch board. "He knew little about the industry when he joined the board as the university representative but made an important contribution during his term," Ward says.

He adds that the deer industry has always had a good open relationship with those providing the research. "Scientists are sometimes accused of being incestuous in their thinking but fortunately that's never been the case with deer research."

Ward says his chats with Whiterock Station's Ross Stevens during the deer progeny test programme helped him form the thinking that led to the widely used seasonal growth charts. "We've always listened to farmers, but this new structure supports that dialogue."

Deer science leadership change

While the country has been consumed with the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, a leadership transition in AgResearch's deer science ranks has been quietly continuing.

Geoff Asher, whose nearly four decades of service to the industry received long-overdue recognition last year when he received the coveted Deer Industry Award, has been easing himself out of the deer science leadership role at AgResearch Invermay. His large shoes are being more than capably filled by Jamie Ward.

Asher had been working three days a week until the end of May, and from then on is working on a casual "as required" basis. One of his ongoing responsibilities within the new Innovation Model structure is as co-leader of the On-Farm Steering Group.

He'll continue to be available to advise Advance Parties, although that will have to be on a remote basis until the end of July at least, which is the end-point of AgResearch's ban on staff air travel. He'll also be available for any other one-off jobs as required. "I won't be stopping cold," he says.

"I'll also be supporting Jamie where needed, and working with people who need any assistance finalising deer-related research papers."

Asher enjoys nothing more than getting out around the country and meeting farmers face-to-face, so the new world of remote contact and Zoom meetings hasn't been his cup of tea. However, he's philosophical about the forced changes under the Covid-19 Alert Levels. "You don't quite get the same camaraderie at a Zoom meeting that you do meeting in the flesh, but it'll come right."

He was looking forward to getting out of the house to spend some time back at Invermay as the country moved down to Alert Level 2 last month, or just getting back out to poke around his favourite fossil-hunting sites. "I was definitely suffering from a bit of cabin fever during lockdown."

For his part, Jamie Ward is continuing under his existing job title of scientist, farm systems as he steps into Geoff Asher's role, something he's excited to be doing. As part of the change the



Geoff Asher (left) and Jamie Ward at work in the deer shed at AgResearch Invermay.

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Waikato deer pioneer honoured

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Murray Powell, widely acknowledged as the father of the deer industry in Waikato, has been made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the Queen's Birthday honours announced on 1 June.

MURRAY, WITH HIS late wife Gloria, started the Hilldale Game Farm in 1966 on 32 hectares at Rotokauri, just west of Hamilton. It began as an enterprise to breed and supply pheasants to the local acclimatisation society, but its purpose soon expanded to include other species and become the Hilldale Zoo and Wildlife Park.

The Powells gifted the park to Hamilton City Council in 1976, but remained as trustees for a facility that by now featured a wide range of birds and animals – including some deer. In 1991, by which time the council had taken over management of the park, it became Hamilton Zoo, now a much-loved community resource. The tremendous contribution of the Powells was recognised by a community service award from Hamilton City in 1995. Murray was made a life member of Hamilton Zoo in 2000.

During the 1970s, as deer farming was taking its first tentative steps, Murray put his experience with deer at the wildlife park to good use, becoming a source of reliable advice for the region's new deer farmers. He was a tremendous font of knowledge in those information-hungry times, willingly giving advice on everything from deer health to yard design.

When deer farming was promoted at the National Agricultural Field Days, Murray led the team of volunteers that planned, built and then manned a replica of a complete deer handling facility.

He is regarded as the father and founder of deer farming in the Waikato. He was the driving force behind the formation of the Waikato Deer Farmers' Association and made a major

contribution to the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association. He is an honorary life member of both organisations.

Alongside his expertise with deer, Murray has had a lifelong interest in bird breeding and his outstanding knowledge of avian husbandry has been put to good use over the years in projects to help preserve native species such as the kōkako and pāteke (brown teal).

Recalling the help Murray had given him setting up his own farm, Clyde Wade noted Murray's generosity of spirit and impact on deer farming in Waikato.

"Murray came out to my farm, paced out proposed fences, gates and races – marking them out with electric fence standards. Murray then built my deer handling facilities – with me providing the materials. Murray would not accept any payment for his work."

DINZ and the NZDFA congratulate Murray for this well-deserved honour. ■



Murray Powell at Rotokauri. (Acknowledgement for photo: Delwyn McDell.)

Innovation model: continued

balance of his role has shifted away from so much hands-on work towards more programme and project leadership.

Ward joined the team at Invermay as a technician in 2003 after spending five years with AgResearch's commercial genomics business, GenomNZ.

"I'll now be the contact for all things deer," he says, acknowledging that the new innovation model for deer research, including the incorporation of VARNZ work, has had a major impact on the shape of his new role – not that he's complaining. He

won't be so directly involved in the genetics work being done out of Invermay now that he's taking more of an oversight position across all portfolios.

The technician position that Ward vacated earlier this year when he was appointed scientist has just been filled by new recruit Charlie Bennett. From a sheep and beef background in the Gisborne region, Bennett has a Masters degree from Lincoln University. "I'll be introducing Charlie to deer farmers and others as we get along to industry events," Ward says. ■

UHF tags planned for 2021

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The new wristband-style VelTrak velvet tags successfully introduced for the 2019/20 velvet season will remain in their present form for the upcoming 2020/21 season. A version incorporating a UHF chip – enabling production of electronic Velvet Status Declarations (eVSDs) – will now be introduced in the 2021/22 season, not this year as originally planned.

THE DECISION TO delay full implementation until August 2021 was made to allow enough time to fully road test the system and educate users, including velvet producers.

DINZ science and policy manager, Catharine Sayer, explains that once the chipped tags are in use, they will feed into a cloud-based traceability system that will track all velvet from harvest to export. DINZ will act as the system operator.

VelTrak will be more than just a new type of tagging – it will integrate all velvet quality assurance systems, Sayer explains, like a type of blockchain.

DINZ quality assurance manager John Tacon says that if someone has failed a shed audit under the RCS, they won't be able to access tags or sell velvet that has any accreditation or food safety assurance behind it.

“Because we will be able to trace velvet so accurately and efficiently, if there is a problem from a particular supplier it would be possible to identify all associated product if necessary, with minimal disruption to the production chain.”

The experience of the dairy industry dealing with issues such as DCD residues and the melamine scandal provided salutary lessons for other food product exporters and VelTrak would help minimise and contain any issues with velvet product if they arose.

Lower Hutt company Times-7 – a global leader in scanning technology – is developing the UHF versions of the tags and providing advice on tag readers and anything UHF related. Sayer says the technology used enables multiple tags to be read simultaneously – unlike NAIT livestock tags which have to be read one at a time. This means recording is done quickly and seamlessly. It's the same technology that scans everything from piles of library books to baggage at airports.

The software development behind VelTrak is nearly complete

and user interfaces will now be tested to iron out any kinks and ensure the system is simple and intuitive. “There will be a lot of user education being done over the next 12 months so people will be well prepared by the time the tags are introduced.”

Surplus stocks of the barcoded wristband-style tags from last season can be used in the upcoming season, Sayer confirms, but not once the new technology is introduced next year. “When the new tags with UHF chips are introduced next year they will probably be a different colour so they are easy to distinguish from the non-chipped tags.”

The cost of the new tags for producers will be very modest in relation to the value of the product, but the system build cost is being paid for out of velvet levies and NVSB fees. DINZ will determine how future running costs will be recovered prior to system launch.

Sayer emphasises that the new system is not about adding a direct dollar premium to the product. “It's about keeping up with changing expectations from our markets and preserving what we already have – our ability to trade our product into food safety conscious markets.” ■



The wristband-style tags had a successful introduction for the 2019/20 season. The UHF chip versions will be introduced for 2021/22.

Benchmarked production and Johne's disease info on your deer

Season	Carcass weight (young deer)
2013	52
2014	53
2015	55
2016	51
2017	60

Deer PRO

To help make and assess your deer management decisions contact **DeerPRO** for your report – **0800 456 453** or **info@deerpro.org.nz**

Pandemic ripples reach deer industry

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

You don't need us to tell you that the Covid-19 pandemic has made a major impact on everyone's lives, at home and work – and in the back pocket. *Deer Industry News* spoke to people throughout the deer industry about the effects of the restrictions during Alert Levels 3 and 4. For some, especially those in drought areas, the restrictions of lockdowns were almost incidental to a much more pressing crisis in their region.

Doing it tough in the Bay

If you believe in a higher power, then you'd have to wonder if she or he has it in for Hawke's Bay in particular right now. On top of the worst drought in decades came the sudden drop in the venison schedule, frustrating delays in getting stock accepted at the works and just for good measure a localised Tb outbreak (no deer herds affected at this stage). And all this came on top of a May deadline for farmers to apply for regional council consents to farm.

As a result, Covid-related issues have been a distant distraction. Hawke's Bay vet Richard Hilson said the biggest issue has been the lockdown movement restrictions that have limited the ability of farmers to interact directly during a time of high stress.

The dry autumn has made it difficult to get hinds to decent body condition scores for mating and Hilson was not expecting scanning figures to be too flash. He was urging deer clients in the region to persevere with scanning despite the likelihood of poor conception rates. He said identifying dry hinds early gave options if farmers were being forced to destock, a "better bet than shoving supplement down every throat".

Palm kernel has been a saviour for some during previous droughts, and Hilson said he had become a "first time" PKE feeder this year. He was surprised to find some deer didn't take very quickly to it, and had to coax fawns and young hinds by mixing in some maize at first. They also took a while to start picking up condition. He said feed options in the Bay are diminishing fast and PKE is assuming a new importance for local deer farmers.

Of course the dry conditions have affected more than just the eastern North Island. Waikato, Auckland, Northland, Bay of



Richard Hilson: Lockdown made it harder for farmers to interact.

Plenty, central North Island and areas of Nelson, Otago and Canterbury have all been doing it tough. With so many areas having such a dry autumn, there's been little spare feed to shuttle between regions. The "Rapa Run" started last month was a rare exception. Wairarapa farmers dodged the worst of the drought and have been shipping surplus feed north to grateful Hawke's Bay farmers.

So did the restrictions of Alert Levels 3 and 4 compound the problems for deer farmers? For those spoken to by *Deer Industry News*, the answer seems to be "not too much", although it hasn't been so easy for people servicing the industry.

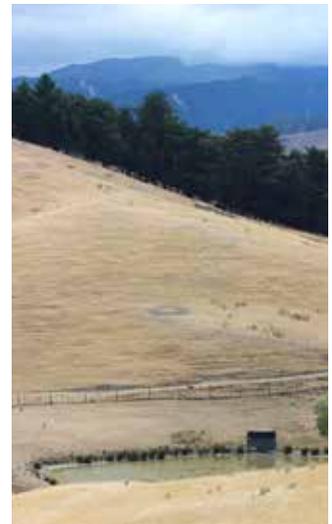
Amy Nicolson, who farms with husband Cam in the Ida Valley, Central Otago, said the lockdown hadn't affected their daily lives too badly. The couple have three children, aged 5, 7 and 9. "I'm grateful they have 500 hectares to play around on and aren't locked down in a city apartment."

She said the local school had helped them adapt well with online learning. "The only big difference is that the kids are coming around the farm with us when they'd normally be in school." Cam's parents were in their bubble, but she hadn't been able to see her own parents who live at Riversdale.

Not being able to meet up with neighbours had been hard, she said. "Sometimes you wish you could just give someone a hug."

Logistics running the farm were still working out well. The local vet clinic had been "amazing" and the local Farmlands had adapted well to the rules around social distancing.

Like the Nicolsons, the family of Ru and Kate Gaddum (with children Lucia and Bruno) weren't too badly affected by the lockdown measures. The Gaddums were part of a fairly large bubble that included brother Harry Gaddum and his wife Emily



There's been recent rain, but drought was the biggest issue for farmers in Hawke's Bay and other regions during lockdown.

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Lockdown: continued

plus farm staff. “I feel for people who are stuck on their own during this,” Ru said. “Having to practise good hygiene and distancing with people like agents coming onto the property has made us think more about health and safety, which is not a bad thing.”

Ru said the pandemic lockdown actually had one positive outcome for them: their much-valued young shepherd, Will Parsons, who had been about to leave for his OE had decided instead to stay around while travel is off the cards. He and his partner were also part of the farm bubble.



Ru and Kate Gaddum with Bruno and Lucia: Fortunate to have had a large extended family “bubble” during lockdown.

Ru and Kate farm at Rangimoe in Central Hawke’s Bay at Kereru, west of Hastings. It’s one of four blocks farmed by the family company. The lockdown had made no big changes in their day-to-day lives or farm operations, Ru said. “It has made us appreciate where we live and also appreciate our families.”

FaceTime was an important tool for keeping in touch with family and in the wider farming community the Hawkes Bay Drought Facebook group was helping keep the region’s drought-stressed farmers connected. The public group now has more than 4,000 members.

The drought conditions made decisions to quit stock easier, and a few cattle had also been got away to better-off areas for grazing. Ru was worried about the body condition of hinds leading up to mating. “It’s been a toss-up between mobbing them up to get them well fed and putting them out with the stags in paddocks as normal.”

The Gaddums had been better placed than some in Hawke’s Bay, having a reasonable kale crop in place for winter and good stocks of bought-in maize grain and baleage (albeit at \$230 a bale), but as the drought continued things got tougher. Ru said he appreciated the need for Silver Fern Farms to drop the schedule to \$5 for now with a possible top-up later. “They were straight-up about it.”

They are going to hold onto deer if they can. After Ru first spoke to *Deer Industry News* the feed situation started to deteriorate. While they didn’t have to send pregnant stock to the works as some had done, they were glad to take up an extraordinarily generous offer of free grazing in the South Island in June (see p25).

He’s also hoping that the pandemic and lockdown has made people realise that looking after the environment is not just down to farmers. “People are seeing the skies clear and pollution falling, but we’ve kept on farming, so hopefully the public will realise that they have a part to play too!”

Covid lesser of two evils

If you gave **George Williams** a choice between coping with Covid-19 measures and coping with drought, he’d take the Covid every time. George, with wife Laura Billings and their school-age children, runs Temco Agriculture in Central Hawke’s Bay, near Tikokino.

Like others we spoke to, George didn’t find the lockdown measures under Levels 3 and 4 too onerous, although they were feeling stuck at home without seeing anyone for a while. He said the worst part of the situation – a combination of drought and pandemic response measures – has been the problems getting stock killed. He said the processors had been trying to be helpful taking a few animals here and there when they could, but in the end it was impractical sending off deer in small batches.



George Williams and Laura Billings.

George is grateful to be fairly well set up going into winter. He’d been feeding the hinds well since January and they were in good condition for mating. The drought had meant crops had “ground to a halt” and the conditions also made nitrate levels in some plants an ongoing risk to stock. He was still impatient for rain by early May so that he could get autumn barley sown it needed to be in the ground by the first week of June at the latest.

Central Hawke’s Bay has been very hard hit and possibly a bit overlooked – not only by the rain that keeps skirting around the edges, but also by people outside the region who don’t appreciate how bad the conditions are.

George agrees that connection within the farm community through the Hawkes Bay Drought Facebook page has provided an excellent boost for many. A sponsored “Drought Shout” for local farmers was hosted in the Temco deer shed on 18 June.

Mental health of farmers a concern

NZDFA Executive Committee member **Mark McCoard** said the lockdown hadn’t had much of a difference day to day on the farm, but was pleased to have son Callum at home during the lockdown as extra support after a very challenging season. His wife Louise, who works off farm, did what office workers around the country do and worked from home.

The keen squash coach had to forego a planned holiday and delay the start of scheduled coaching, while NZDFA business has been carried out remotely via online meetings, something that has worked well. Mark’s main worry through the combination of widespread drought and lockdown conditions is the mental health



Mark McCoard: farmer mental health is a priority for the NZDFA Executive Committee.

of farmers.

He said the Executive Committee was encouraging branches to stay connected with members and check in on people regularly. "During these challenging times farmers can think they are doing worse than others, but when they get an opportunity to

share their stresses this is often shown not to be the case. The real problems happen when people stop making proactive decisions to deal with things like feed or water shortages."

Vet concerned about lockdown distraction

Things might have been more or less business as usual on farm, but for rural veterinarian and Advance Party facilitator **Ginny Dodunski**, the lockdown period and drought have combined to make life extremely busy.

She said there had been some uncertainty and debate within the vet profession about what qualified as an "essential service", but the rural side of her mixed practice (Totally Vets, Taumarunui)



Ginny Dodunski said referrals to the Rural Support Trust have been increasing.

was flat out.

"Lockdown occurred through our busiest time for beef pregnancy testing," she said. "This year every action that farmers can take to drop stock numbers has been critical and this work is more important than ever. People on-farm are under pressure from the drought conditions

and somewhat distracted by the lockdown, which means they aren't always paying attention to detail. That can show up in animal health problems."

The social distancing message hadn't always been taken on board when visiting farms, Ginny said. "We had to remind a few people to back off!"

On the deer side a lot of her work was helping people identify dry and late hinds, get feed budgets right and get stock off to the works. The fall in the schedule was not so good for some of the farm systems in her area. "Many people in our AP were doing fine with systems that rely on bought-in feed and a schedule over \$7, but going forward we're really going to have to look at budgets and

make sure systems are making the most profitable use of grass."

She had been hoping to get her own AP group together during lockdown through Zoom meetings, but some were not too keen on the technology. "It's a shame," Ginny says, adding that the online gatherings can bring groups together more easily, especially those spread over a wide area. She's been a fan of online meetings since before Covid-19 and has been pleased to make better use of the technology in other areas.

The prolonged drought in the King Country was the main cause of stress for farmers rather than lockdown, and Ginny said anecdotally referrals to the Rural Support Trust had been increasing.



David Wiering (left) with son Cameron and grandsons Hamish, Joshua and Nicholas.

Deer transport movements well down

David Wiering, who runs **Central Deer Freighters** with wife Gwenda and son Cameron, has certainly been feeling the impact of the Covid-19 lockdown on the deer industry. When *Deer Industry News* called, Gwenda was just preparing the Canterbury-based company's April invoices and said they looked "pretty sad".

David Wiering estimates their deer business, which is about 80 percent of their stock transport work, was down by half during lockdown. They run four trucks and service the entire South Island.

He was worried about the coming chilled season too, when work usually picks up after a winter slowdown. "If there are no markets [for chilled venison] it won't happen."

continued on page 20

Lockdown: continued

He's noticed a lot of uncertainty among deer farmers, with fewer weaners being bought and sold this year. Drought conditions in North Canterbury were also making things harder, although the condition of the post-rut weaners wasn't looking too bad considering. Their own farm at Halkett, west of Christchurch was dry with the irrigators still running in May. "I've fed our weaners as best I can, but they are still down by 7kg on last year." David and Gwenda run 90 hinds and 100 velvetters.

He said the trophy industry was also suffering badly from the complete shutdown of overseas tourist traffic. "A lot of stags will be unshot this year. It's also affecting support businesses like taxidermists."

The lingering uncertainty was the main challenge right now, he said. "I'm in favour of the lockdown, but it has to be done right."

David said the company had given farmers guidelines on safety during the Covid-19 Alert Levels. "We have a paperless system so we've asked the farmers to leave deer in the shed for us to collect and stay away. It's not how we'd usually work but they've been understanding. No-one will forget this. We'll always be conscious of the [infectious disease] health risks now."

Venison plant adapts well to distancing

People working at close quarters faced special challenges, including **Gabriel Briennesse**, trainer at Silver Fern Farms' Kennington Plant. *Deer Industry News* asked Gabriel what the necessary changes meant in his workplace.

DIN: *What it was like working with the extra distancing and separation?*

GB: Initially it was a bit mind boggling. At our plant everything is shifted manually with no belts, so configuring the tables and installing safety barriers to ensure we kept the correct distancing was the initial challenge. We also had to ensure that the flow-on effects weren't detrimental to the next worker. Once these changes were implemented, we found that we made some considerable gains in product flow. Although we started by reducing the tallies, we managed to get better throughput. We are now starting to review what changes will stay during level one and beyond.

DIN: *How did you feel about going to work knowing Covid-19 was in your community?*

GB: We knew that Covid-19 was prevalent in our community, so it was a bit daunting to start off with. There was a focus on minimising the risks at the plant, which helped to make sure our people weren't worried about coming to work. We introduced additional sanitising, cleaning, social distancing in the tea room and I was part of the team who placed the barriers on every entry and exit. Also, we educated our people to make sure they understood what was required to keep them safe. It felt a bit like being back in primary school telling people what to do! But the team responded well and have adapted to our new ways of working.

Research programme affected

AgResearch farm systems scientist **Jamie Ward** said the organisation took the Government's Covid-19 response seriously and mirrored the "go hard and early" strategy. "Staff travel was shut down from an early stage." Also in response to the pandemic the NZ Society of Animal Production decided to cancel its 2020 conference, which was scheduled for early July.



Gabriel Briennesse photographed during a venison boning demonstration at Silver Fern Farms' headquarters in 2016.

Only essential people (farm team and a site engineer) were allowed at the Invermay site, so Jamie has been working from home, which gave him a bit of space to catch up on report writing.

"The biggest impact of the pandemic response for the deer work at Invermay was the shelving of the 2020 deer AI programme. The logistics of that are massive. Fortunately, we were able to use diverse sire lines that we had on the farm so the year wasn't a complete write-off – we'll have a good range of progeny to work with, in 2021."

Jamie said that unlike surrounding areas, the Invermay farm at Mosgiel had a dream run with weather during autumn. "Weaning weights were good and the hinds were in good condition for mating."

The decision to cancel the Tomorrow's Deer AI programme at Invermay this year was not made lightly, Jamie adds.

"However, it was taken out of AgResearch's hands by Covid-19 Level 4, as MPI determined that science work was non-essential. All AgResearch science except vital delivery to farmers (e.g. animal health diagnostic testing) was paused. That meant the only work allowed with the deer (or other species) during lockdown was anything needed to monitor and maintain health and welfare. Fortunately weighing weaners once during Alert Level 4 was allowed as it was important for animal health monitoring." ■



Jamie Ward: 2020 AI programme had to be shelved, but breeding programme will still yield good information. Photo: Peter Drury.

Smooth running for the 2020 NZDFA AGM via Zoom

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The NZDFA's 45th Annual General Meeting marked a first for the association, when 44 participants gathered online on 21 May from the comfort of their own home offices via Zoom. Apart from the occasional voice or video dropping out and group applause sounding a bit thin (unmute before you clap, Zoom newbies), the meeting went without a hitch.

CONGRATULATIONS TO CHAIR John Somerville and the Executive Committee (EC) with support from Tony Pearse and Rebecca Norling for making it happen – it's not as simple as it looked on the night. The full minutes will be available in due course. This report picks out the highlights.

Obituaries and remembrance

The meeting marked the passing of the following during the year with a minute's silence:

Frances Swann	Geraldine (Life member)
Jack Pullar	EWSNZ
Adrian Moody	Wairarapa
Jim Cameron	Fiordland
Kelvin Kimber	Canterbury
Janet Horrell	Southland

Chair's report

EC chair John Somerville gave an outline of his report. This is available in full in the NZDFA 2019/20 Annual Report, which can be downloaded and read from: www.deernz.org/publications

David Stevens (Southland) seconded acceptance of the chair's report – his response can also be read in full in the 2019/20 annual report, but in particular he noted an encouraging slight increase in NZDFA membership following several years of decline. He also commented on the ongoing success of the P2P and Next Generation programmes and the good collaboration between DINZ and NZDFA when making representations in support of the industry, especially on environmental matters.

Election results

Karen Middelberg (Hawke's Bay) was welcomed to the EC. Karen replaces Grant Charteris, who has stepped down after 8 years in the role. John Somerville thanked Grant for his service on the EC and noted that underneath Grant's irrepressible sense of humour lay a lot of deep thinking.

Executive Committee chair (2019/20) **John Somerville** was re-elected unopposed to the EC.

Also re-elected unopposed were **Paddy Boyd** and **Leith Chick**, to the Selection and Appointments Panel.

Finances

The association's finances are healthy. Treasurer Justin Stevens reported that equity had increased by \$3,355 during the year. This



would be added to reserves, building them to nearly \$176,000. A \$10,000 donation from these reserves (see below) would still leave the NZDFA with full coffers. The association is required to keep at least \$100,000 in reserve.

As a result of the Covid-19 Alert Level measures restricting travel and meetings, the EC expected 2020/21 expenses to be below budget, although that might be somewhat offset by higher fares when routine travel around the country resumes.

If another surplus is achieved through greatly lower expenses in the current year, the EC is likely to return this to branches via capitation, rather than simply accumulating more reserves. Funds transferred to branches this way are not subject to taxation, whereas surpluses are taxed.

In response to a question about the higher-than-budgeted expenses for PR support, it was noted that the bulk of this spending took the form of a \$10,000 contribution to the upcoming book on the first 50 years of deer farming by Lynda Gray. Other items of note included \$5,000 towards parasite workshops (yet to be completed thanks to Covid-19) and \$7,500 towards leadership development with the Next Generation programme and attendees at the initial Ag Innovation conference at the University of Otago. The Spiers Memorial Trust also co-funded these initiatives at the same level.

Board candidate: Kris Orange

Orange, who is standing unopposed for a second term on the DINZ Board, gave his statement to the meeting, noting that the composition of the DINZ Board is the envy of other sectors. His full statement can be seen in the NZDFA's 2019/20 Annual Report (link above). He added that he was "gutted" to see the venison schedule falling to half what it was 18 months

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Online Q+A with DINZ Board

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Face-to-face meetings were off the agenda for this year's conference season, but that didn't stop the DINZ board and NZDFA Executive Committee (EC) having an online Google meeting on 19 May. *Deer Industry News* listened in. (Questions are in italics.)

Given the Government has indicated strong support for business ahead, does the deer industry have any "shovel-ready" projects that could utilise this assistance? And could this be within or an extension of the P2P programme, which ceases in 2022, or is there better alternative?

Replying on behalf of DINZ, CEO **Innes Moffat** said there were no big projects ready, but that the industry did support improvements to rural infrastructure (roads, bridges, broadband) and environmental management. For the deer industry the strongest need was in training and professional advisory services and DINZ is talking to the Ministry for Primary Industries about this, he said. "That could be part of P2P or whatever succeeds it."

Moffat was unsure whether projects that were already underway (e.g. VelTrak) would qualify for assistance.

Communication at board level: We have proudly publicly stated that our industry has a great relationship between companies in new market development and high level industry strategy. Has this been working during the current crisis and will these relationships help us as we endeavour to find solutions in a changed marketplace?

Board member **Danny Hailes**, Alliance Group, answered for processors. He said they were not burying their heads in the sand and were trying to communicate as best they could in the circumstances. "So the answer is yes."

Processing companies' communication to farmer suppliers beyond emails: Have the companies got their reps actively contacting suppliers to access any stock supply changes and ensure that they are fully in the picture of what's happening on farms? And with good information, are they trying to stop any panic decision making that could make an already tough market even worse and undermine our future?

Hailes said he could only answer for Alliance Group. Their livestock reps had been instructed to keep up weekly contact with suppliers. Under Levels 3 and 4 they could only visit if absolutely necessary, but under Level 2 they could visit more freely.

They had also put out communications about supply contracts. "I've been talking to a lot of farmers myself. If you want to talk to your company you only have to pick up the phone. It can be good to talk to someone from the company other than your livestock rep for a different angle."

DINZ chair **Ian Walker** asked the EC what was their preferred form of communication from DINZ. EC chair **John Somerville** said email was important but many people didn't read them. He added that some farmers were getting very "wound up" by some misinformed comments. "We don't want people making bad decisions because they've received wrong information."

He acknowledged that under lockdown, face-to-face contact

between DINZ and deer farmers was restricted.

Board member **William Oliver** suggested farmers might be interested in tuning into online lunchtime Zoom-type forums with people from the DINZ executive or board available to answer questions, "instead of tuning in to Jamie McKay".

John Somerville agreed this could work well. He was supported in that by EC member **Mark McCoard**, who said a face-to-face meeting between Rhys Griffiths, Tony Cochrane and Taihape deer farmers had worked well, so the online idea could also be valuable in lieu of travel.

The industry and processors have done a great job over the last few years at diversifying markets and achieving product price stability. However the situation we find ourselves in now with Covid-19 was unforeseen.

(a) *What lessons can be taken from this and what steps does the board see the industry could take to make us less vulnerable to the effects of a world-wide economic downturn?*

(b) *Venison has been particularly affected due to its positioning in the market as a high-end product. Is it possible to maintain value and establish and sell local trade/online/processed goods or at least have the agility to adapt to these markets when needed?*

Board member **Simon Limmer** (Silver Fern Farms) said market development work had served the industry well so far, but it remained quite "niche" and had left venison exports exposed to the foodservice sector. "With [venison] in particular we seem to get hit by volatility about once every seven years."

Gerard Hickey (Firstlight Venison) said the retail and home delivery sides of the venison business were weathering the storm better than the foodservice sector. As a result, it was harder shifting middles, which were mainly used in foodservice. He said business from airlines and foodservice would return, and advised against making big changes in response to current conditions. It took a lot of work to develop retail business; it could not be created overnight, so that channel needed to be preserved. "There are cracks out there but nothing's broken. We need to look after our customers when they come back."

John Somerville said the Government's 2020 Budget was big on spending but low on detail and asked the board what the Government meant when it said it wanted to help agriculture and markets.

Innes Moffat said DINZ had asked MPI and Trade & Enterprise for further information.

EC member **Justin Stevens** asked whether the large margins put on venison by overseas supermarkets are still there. Simon Limmer noted that retail chains had become more powerful in recent years but said the growth of e-commerce could help break that down. ■

Conversations with family

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

The next generation is moving in. More than 80 deer farming families have taken part in the NZDFA's succession planning sessions over the past three years, since the subject was first raised at a Next Generation conference in 2017.

FOURTEEN 3.5 HOUR workshops, held throughout the country, were facilitated by Tony Hammington of PeerReview. They were actively participated in by 206 individuals and held over 15 months from June 2018 to last year's Next Generation conference in Twizel. The workshops were co-funded by NZDFA, DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) through its Sustainable Food & Fibre Futures programme.

Each workshop averaged about 15 participants and included multi-generations with a mix of farming and non-farming family members. Participants workshopped in groups on goals and challenges and heard presentations on change process, succession issues, managing conflict, a one-page business plan and case-study discussions. The latter two were rated most highly by the attendees.

Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, reports DINZ producer manager Tony Pearse.

"The exercise was well worth doing," he says. "Following the



Ashley Hart speaking on succession planning at the 2017 Next Generation conference.

sessions, it was apparent that your integrity is the main thing that defines how well progress with planning and succession will go."

Ashley Hart, who spoke on the topic at a Next Generation conference at AgResearch Invermay (*Deer Industry News*, October/November 2017), is delighted at the response to the workshops.

"It's really awesome that so many families wanted to be involved and that they're keen to learn how to do it, even though it may seem like an impossible task," she says.

Her original presentation was based on an industry project conducted while she was at Otago Polytechnic studying for a Bachelor of Applied Management degree, specialising in accounting.

Hart's early years were spent on a lifestyle block outside Dunedin, next door to a sheep and beef property where she gained early practical experience. Later, she spent two years at Telford College, completing a Certificate in Agriculture and Diploma in Rural Business – especially enjoying her time in the deer unit there in her second year, amongst other operations.

"Deer are really interesting animals," she says. "If you can learn to read and work with them, you're well placed to work with any other kind of livestock."

She worked on her final-year project with AbacusBio, Geraldine farm consultant George Collier and Dunedin accounting firm Harvie Green Wyatt, following Collier's suggestion to take a close look at farm succession planning. She spent five months researching the topic and – her favourite part – talking to three farming families working through it. Her final paper was the basis of an AbacusBio document, *Farm Succession Planning: Getting the Basics Right*.

"To me, farm succession planning is the process of passing on traditions, skills ownership and control of the farm business to the next generation," she says.

Deer farmers face similar issues as sheep and beef farmers, with career pathways not as well defined in the drystock sector compared with dairy, which has sharemilking and equity partnerships in its business toolbox.

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Succession: continued

Hart found, as many of the workshop participants have subsequently too, that it's a complex and emotional subject for farming families to broach and each farm succession case is unique.

"Navigating all the barriers takes time, patience, planning and communication."

She strongly advocates talking about it earlier, rather than later. Preparing well for the initial conversations helps to break the ice on what can be a tricky subject.

First, determine whether succession is financially viable for all parties, then – and this is the most important element of farm succession planning, according to Hart – "Talk. Communicate openly and transparently. Find out what people want. If you don't know what people want, you can't even begin to get there," she says.

Each family is unique in the way it communicates and that has a significant impact on the progression of succession planning, she says.

Hart suggests learning about potential issues. Regular, formally minuted farm business meetings and an annual succession meeting involving all of the family (those off-farm as well as on) can be a great way of encouraging effective communication and making sure everyone's wishes are accounted for.

"Achieving a desirable outcome relies on each family member

showing a willingness for open and honest communication," she says, stressing that effective listening is as important as talking.

When making decisions about changes to business structures and asset transfer to the next generation, lawyers and accountants need to be closely involved.

"They play a key role in informing clients and presenting strategies on how the family may best achieve desired outcomes, while preserving as much of the family wealth as possible. Farm succession is a complex task with many factors to consider and address. Your accountant or banker may be able to refer you to succession specialists," she suggests.

The 26-year-old hopes to be one of those specialists before long, after she graduates from her chartered accountancy qualifications later this year. She's been studying for those over the past three years with current employer Harvie Green and Wyatt, where she's been building the skills to pick up where she left off.

For those starting out on the succession journey, or keen to find out more, check out *Farm Succession Planning: Getting the Basics Right* and the other resources available at www.deernz.org

Tony Pearse says the NZDFA is happy to take advice from Next Generation attendees about future succession planning sessions, as this topic is always front of mind.

"The NZDFA is grateful for the participation, input and support of all those who supported the initial project," he says. ■

AGM: continued

earlier. He noted that Covid-19 and "disappointing" behaviour from some marketers had jammed the brakes on the venison sector.

"We will ask ourselves if [the foodservice focus] was still the right strategy. We can't sustain these current prices being paid to farmers, but while so many of our trading partners remain in turmoil we'll just have to wait it out until restaurants reopen and we can rebuild the market for our fine product."

He said that the velvet situation was more positive, with the main selling season finished and even a prospect of increased demand as had happened following the SARS outbreak. "VelTrak will help us stay in front of competitors but we'll have to carefully manage production."

Orange said one silver lining from Covid-19 was that people were realising how important farmers were. "We'll have to market and farm differently [following Covid] but New Zealand is well placed to answer the call."

He will be interviewed by the Selection and Appointments Panel later this month.

\$10k donation to HB Rural Support Trust

The only item of general business was a motion to make a \$10,000 donation to the Hawke's Bay Rural Support Trust (RST) to help fund the extra demand on their support services as a result of the extreme pressure being felt by drought-affected farmers in the region.

Speaking in support, Grant Charteris said the RST had helped him tremendously following the death of his father and the donation would be greatly appreciated as the Trust "runs on the smell of an oily rag". He said some farmers will say they're okay when called, but it's important to keep checking in. "In Hawke's

Bay there are eight people on the phone all day calling and supporting farmers."

It was noted that donations to the RST can go towards paying for feed transport. (The South Canterbury DFA is also looking into collecting bales of feed for transport to the North Island.)

The proposal was passed unanimously. "It's a good feeling when everyone rallies around," Grant Charteris said.

In response to the donation, David Todd of the Hawke's Bay Rural Support Trust later said: "It is difficult to describe the depth of gratitude we feel tonight having received the news that the NZ Deer Farmers' Association has committed to donate \$10,000 to help our efforts to support farmers in Hawke's Bay."

In reply, EC chair John Somerville noted that the Hawke's Bay Drought Facebook page started by Poppy Renton had helped inspire the NZDFA to provide support. He said the donation was also motivated "because of the huge impact on our national deer farming industry that the Hawke's Bay deer farming pioneers – and now the modern Hawke's Bay deer farmers, with some farms now their 3rd generation – have created, through leadership, innovation and farming excellence."

Producer Management staffing

Tony Pearse acknowledged the great contribution made by **Rebecca Norling** to communications and conference management during her stint providing cover for **Cenwynn Philip**, who has been on maternity leave. He announced Cenwynn would be returning from July working 3 days a week, while **Amy Wills** will be back for 2 days a week, one day each for P2P and DFA projects. Both will be working mainly from home. Rebecca will continue doing some contract work for DINZ. ■

Helping parched neighbours

WITH A HIGHLY stocked farm and a serious feed shortage going into winter, Ru Gaddum knew they were getting into strife. So when the offer came from Hamish Orbell to winter their pregnant hinds at Clayton Station near Fairlie – where they had an abundance of feed available – the Gaddums were grateful to accept.

It's the kind of help that's sprung from some strong inter-Island networking over the past couple of years. Advance Party groups from Hawke's Bay and the southern South Island have been touring each other's regions and cementing enduring friendships along the way. And it's times like this when those connections really matter.

Ru and wife Kate (see also pp17-18) are at Rangimoe in Central Hawke's Bay, one of three deer blocks run by the Gaddum family. Although normally summer safe, the farm was suffering from prolonged drought along with the rest of the region.

Hearing how tight things were in Hawke's Bay, Hamish



Rangimoe was bone dry and short of feed going into winter.

contacted Grant Charteris and Richard Hilson in Hawke's Bay to tell them he had spare winter grazing available on a block he'd recently deer fenced.

"Grant and Richard had just visited us and knew our situation, so suggested we take up the offer. At first I worried that sending the hinds such a long way was a bit extreme, but when I did the maths it actually made sense," Ru says.

"The cost of the return freight is about the equivalent to one month's supply of baleage for those hinds." The Gaddums are sending the 390 in-fawn hinds to graze at Clayton Station for about three and a half months, planning to bring them back in late September.



Yippeee! The Gaddums' hinds leap off the truck into abundant feed at Clayton Station.

Downlands Deer is freighting the hinds in three loads.

Ru is relieved and grateful for the support. "Hamish has told me the hinds got a bit of a culture shock when they arrived and saw their first snow, but they're settling in well." ■



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Waterways decision: some relief but questions remain

The Government's freshwater policy decisions, announced on 28 May, are less restrictive than indicated in the 2019 Essential Freshwater discussion document. This gives cause for some relief, and it's clear the comprehensive submission and lobbying done by DINZ and NZDFA made a real difference. Not having to fence waterways on slopes more than 10° and being able to use a feed pad without a resource consent can be sheeted home to the deer industry's submissions. Nonetheless, questions will remain for the deer industry while the details are ironed out.

DINZ CHAIR IAN Walker said the decisions "give us more certainty about what we need to do on our farms to comply with the revised national freshwater quality standard and new regulations."

He said making farm environment plans mandatory should not be a burden, so long as the proposed farm plans address actual environmental risks and auditing reflects deer farming knowledge and understanding of deer behaviours.

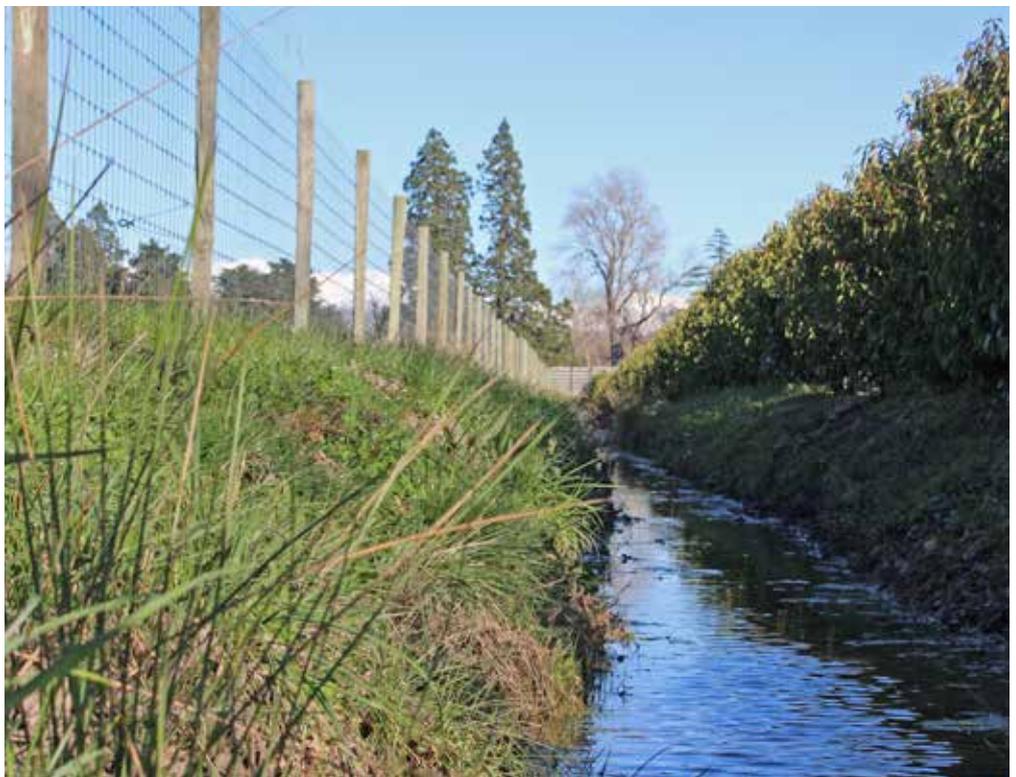
"We support the principle of higher freshwater standards, but we are very cautious about adding layers of bureaucracy and additional costs on deer farmers. Also there is very little expertise outside our industry about the most effective ways to minimise the impacts of deer on the environment," he said.

"The Government deserves credit for listening to farmer feedback and for withdrawing or amending some of its more extreme proposals. The stock waterway exclusion rules are now generally focused on intensity of land use, which will be a relief for many running low-intensity operations in the hills.

"However, there will be issues for some beef and deer farmers who have low-intensity grazing operations, particularly on tussock-covered flats in some of the South Island high country and in some high rainfall regions, especially on the West Coast, where low-slope paddocks are criss-crossed with creeks."

Walker said fencing all streams in these situations is unaffordable, impractical and will have very little environmental benefit.

"Most of our deer farms are on hill country, in areas where winter forage cropping is practised; many of us will be required to apply for a resource consent for cropping paddocks that have



DINZ is cautious about added layers of cost and bureaucracy stemming from the reforms.

a 10° or greater slope. We will be looking more closely at the implications of this."

Walker noted there is a good understanding within the industry of how to minimise the impact of deer during winter feeding. He added that the five-year study into the impact of deer on water quality in hill and high country will provide good data to further refine decision-making.

"We look forward to seeing the detail of the new National Environmental Standards for Freshwater and National Policy Statement for Freshwater Management. The devil will be in the detail. Our objectives are to help the deer industry play its part along with all New Zealanders, in improving freshwater quality, while making sure regulations achieve their desired purpose without imposing unnecessary costs or compliance hassles on farmers."

Summary

By 2025 farmers will be required to:

- Make sure all cattle, pigs and deer are kept out of waterways more than a metre wide in low-slope areas, and from waterways on all land used for fodder-cropping, break-feeding, or grazing on irrigated pasture, including on hill country, from July 2025 at the latest.
- Apply for a resource consent before intensifying land use, for example converting land to dairy. This requirement applies from mid-2020, when the regulations come into force (exact start date to be confirmed), until the end of 2024.
- Protect wetlands and streams on your land. This means you cannot drain or develop them, except in very limited circumstances, starting from mid-2020 when the regulations come into force.
- Apply best practice to winter grazing on forage crops. From winter 2021, get a resource consent if you want to plant more than 50 ha or 10 percent of your farm in forage crops (whichever is the greater), or on paddocks with more than a 10° slope.
- Keep synthetic nitrogen fertiliser use at appropriate levels.
- Meet minimum standards or apply for a resource consent for stock-holding pads from mid-2021 and feedlots from mid-2020 when the regulations come into force. This only applies to cattle and does not include stockyards or shearing sheds.
- If you have an existing resource consent to take a lot of water, report on your water usage electronically (phased in over six years, depending how much you take).

In the **medium term** (this decade) farmers will be required to:

- Have a freshwater module in a farm plan. Over the next 12+ months, the Government will work with interested groups to set out the exact requirements for mandatory freshwater modules of farm plans. It is the intention to build on existing industry body or agribusiness farm plans. Catchments most in need of improvement or protection will be prioritised.

In the **long term** (decades) farmers will be required to:

- Meet any specific regional requirements to achieve national bottom lines and community freshwater objectives. For example, some regional councils already require farmers to have a farm plan to meet regional targets. These will continue and requirements may be strengthened.

Highlights relevant to deer

- New fences for stock exclusion have to be set back 3 metres from streams (not the 5 originally proposed) and the deadlines are pushed out by 2 years.

- Existing permanent stock exclusion fences won't have to be moved.
- Hill country requirements are less restrictive than first proposed, but they include stock exclusion from wetlands identified by councils and intensive grazing of cattle and deer (rather than areas with a high carrying capacity).
- Cattle and deer have to be excluded from lakes and rivers more than 1 metre wide where land is used for fodder cropping, break feeding or is irrigated pasture. Deadline is 1 July 2023.
- On land less than 10° slope, cattle and deer have to be excluded from lakes and rivers more than 1 metre wide by 1 July 2025.
- Wetlands identified in a regional or district plan must have cattle, deer and pigs excluded by 1 July 2025.
- Exclusion can encompass permanent or temporary fencing and there is allowance for "virtual" fencing and "smart" stock collars.
- Resource consent will be required to intensify until the end of 2024, after which regional plans are expected to provide a framework for decisions on intensification.
- A resource consent will be required for winter grazing on larger or steeper areas. Crops need to be 5 metres from waterways and there are limits on the amount of pugging. Bare ground must be resown within 1 month after the end of grazing.
- The cap on synthetic nitrogen application is 190kg/ha/year. Dairy farmers will have to report N use levels to regional councils, but drystock farmers will not.
- Deer have been exempted from a requirement to limit stock crossings of waterways to twice per month. Deer have also been exempted from requirements relating to feed pads. These exemptions resulted directly from submissions made by the deer industry on the Healthy Waterways proposals.
- Consented water extraction will need to be measured electronically for reporting to councils. This is being phased in, with higher-volume extraction coming first.
- Farm environment plans will need to include an auditable and enforceable freshwater module. This requirement will be phased in, with areas that have less healthy waterways likely to be prioritised.
- Farmers will be required to meet any specific regional requirements to achieve national bottom lines and community freshwater objectives, as happens now.

Information for drystock farmers:

www.mfe.govt.nz/publications/fresh-water/action-healthy-waterways-information-sheep-beef-and-deer-farmers

General information:

www.mfe.govt.nz/action-for-healthy-waterways ■

Winter grazing reminders

THE WINTER GRAZING Action Group has called for farmers to follow good practices as winter sets in. The group's independent chair Dr Lindsay Burton reminded those looking after stock to take care with transitioning them from pasture to crops and back again.

Access to drinking water and shelter were also important, as was access to suitable areas where stock could lie down, Burton said. He suggested a simple strategy of keeping the best-sheltered

paddock in reserve in case of a weather event.

He praised the good work already done by farmers on improving wintering practices, in spite of the challenges posed by the Covid-19 lockdown and adverse weather events.

The deer industry is represented on the Winter Grazing Action Group by producer manager Tony Pearse.

For further information: <https://bit.ly/2yUI1Xp> ■

Venison and Portobello Mushroom Pie

Preparation: 1 hour • Time to cook: 20 mins

Ingredients

Pie

- 400g shortcrust pastry
- 50ml vegetable oil or butter
- 500g diced leg meat clean of silverskin cut into 1–2cm cubes
- 1 tbspn paprika
- Cracked black pepper and salt
- 1 large onion 125g diced
- 2 medium Portobello mushrooms pre-roasted and diced the same size as onions
- 1 tspn chopped thyme
- ½ tspn chopped sage
- 100ml reduced meat stock
- 75ml red wine
- 1 tspn mustard
- 2 tbspn tomato paste
- A dash Worcestershire sauce
- Red wine vinegar to taste
- 1 heaped tablespoon tapioca flour mixed to a slurry with water
- 400g puff pastry rolled about 3mm thick
- 1 beaten egg

Onion marmalade

- 6 red onions
- 6 cloves crushed garlic
- 1 cup of brown sugar
- 115g butter
- ½ cup red wine or Balsamic vinegar
- 1 pint dark beer
- 60g dark chocolate
- Salt and ground black pepper to taste

Onion marmalade

Brown onions and garlic in butter and cook slowly to a light caramel. Add the sugar, cook till dissolved then add the beer. Reduce then add chocolate and cook down to a jammy consistency. Cool and keep in an airtight container.

Method

You will need four individual pie tins or one family pie dish about 200mm diameter coated with oil and dusted with flour. Roll the shortcrust pastry about 4mm thick and line the bottom of the dish with this, press well down into corners, and chill.

Heat a heavy pan to very hot with oil/butter. Season the venison with the paprika, cracked pepper and salt and sear till well browned on all sides but still rare to medium rare. Remove from the pan and cool.

In the same pan, sauté the onions until brown and add the diced mushrooms. Add the wine and remaining ingredients, reduce and season with vinegar, salt and pepper. Thicken with the tapioca flour – it will get very thick. Cook through until sauce is shiny, not opaque. Cool.

Add the cooled meat and sauce together and place into chilled and rested pie dish(s). Put one tablespoon of onion marmalade on top of each pie, brush edges with water and place the puff pastry on top. Press edges well and crimp. Remove excess pastry and brush on eggwash. Vent into middle of dish with a sharp knife. Bake in a very hot oven at 240°C for about 18–20 minutes. The pastry should be a rich, almost dark colour.

To watch Graham Brown prepare this pie:

<https://bit.ly/3eOgNB6> ■

