



Deer Industry News

Perseverance
paying off in
US and Asia

Deer 101 day

OTAGO MPI & REGIONAL
COUNCIL STAFF GET
FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE
OF DEER FARMING

DINZ hits the road

MORE THAN 300 FARMERS
ATTEND SUCCESSFUL
SERIES OF DINZ ROADSHOWS
COVERING BOTH ISLANDS

Netherdale era ending

LEADING STUD CALLS
TIME AFTER FOUR DECADES
BUILDING QUALITY OF
NZ ANTLER GENETICS

Deer Industry News

OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF DEER INDUSTRY NEW ZEALAND AND THE NEW ZEALAND DEER FARMERS' ASSOCIATION

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EDITOR Phil Stewart, Words & Pictures
LAYOUT Rory Stewart

How we communicate

One of the most important things we do – both DINZ and NZDFA – is communicate with deer farmers. There's no shortage of effort to do this. Not only is there this magazine; there is also our website, eNews, NZDFA Stagline, workshops, videos – the list goes on.



Innes Moffat.

WHAT WE HAVEN'T done so much is check in to see if we're doing it right – not only what we're communicating but also *how* we're interacting with deer farmers. Earlier this year we went to find out, through a deer farmer communication preference survey.

A random sample of 52 deer farmers shared their thoughts on communication and media preferences. It was an in-depth conversation and revealed useful insights.

First, there were no strong messages that we're doing it wrong. Farmers were largely happy with the different ways we communicate. But there is always room for improvement. For example, farmers want to read more about what others are doing on their own places. While we've always tried to include that practical content, we need to do more of it and we will.

There was also an appetite for market information, something we can certainly do more of. And, given the recent growth in the sector, there's big demand for more information on velvet production.

The rating by farmers for *Deer Industry News* was strongly positive, with an overall usefulness score of 8/10. Digging deeper, we found older farmers read the magazine more thoroughly while younger readers are more likely to browse.

The Deer Facts were also widely recognised and valued, as are the growth curve charts. About half the interviewees have visited the DINZ website, but those visits can be rare, so we'd like to make the content more attractive to a wider range of farmers.

The two electronic newsletters – DINZ eNews and NZDFA Stagline – are both reasonably well recognised and read, but some found it difficult to tell them apart, something we'll look to fix. Many also appreciate getting newsletters from their vet practice, velvet or venison companies.

As expected, younger farmers made greater use of online searches and social media. Of the two Facebook pages we asked about, DINZ's page and the Next Generation NZ Deer Farmers page, there was a clear preference for the Next Generation page.

We also asked about email traffic and found most people aren't too bothered by the volume they get – something that surprised us.

Most have traditional tastes in television. Nearly all watch the 6pm news when it screens and *Country Calendar* is still an overwhelming favourite. A lot keep up with news on their smartphones while very few get a daily newspaper.

Many like watching short videos on practical subjects such as how to repair a piece of equipment. Most are interested in improving productivity and environmental performance.

There was very useful feedback from the survey and it will help shape the way we communicate with you. The NZDFA is also looking closely at the feedback about their communications.

Our thanks to all those who were interviewed – your input has been very useful and all will benefit from this. ■

– Innes Moffat, chief executive, Deer Industry New Zealand

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Wintering tips aplenty on Deer 101 day

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Officials from regional councils and the Ministry for Primary Industries got a first-hand look at what wintering deer involves on two separate “Deer 101” days in Southland and Otago in April. *Deer Industry News* tagged along to the Otago course on a warm autumn day and found that not only was it a great learning experience about welfare and environment for newbies to the deer industry, but there were also heaps of great tips for farmers.

ABOUT 15 OFFICIALS came along to the Otago day and showed plenty of interest in managing deer safely through the coldest months. The day was facilitated by Megan McCall (AbacusBio), supported by DINZ environmental stewardship manager, Sara Elmes.

They visited two contrasting farms: Black Forest Park at Outram near Dunedin is mainly flat and can get quite wet. The average 1,125 mm rainfall is fairly well spread through the year, although they had endured serious drought this season. Andrews Farm at Kokonga is about 90km north. It’s higher, colder and drier (about 800 mm). Drought has affected this area too. There’s usually about 170 mm over the Christmas period – this season they had about 12 mm.

Black Forest Park overview

Black Forest Park covers two properties: 140 ha at Outram and another 280 (246 effective) ha on more sloping land about 100 km southwest at Clinton. The two properties run as a unit, producing venison, velvet and trophy animals. Owner Richard Currie said the trophy side had accounted for up to one-third of the business income at one point, but that was significantly less while borders were closed.



Young stags at Black Forest Park.

As well as trophy animals to game parks, Black Forest sells sire stags and elite hinds.

Crops grown for wintering include fodder beet (with emphasis starting to swing back towards swedes), rape and cereals for whole-crop silage. Adult hinds get an allowance of 2 kg of fodder beet plus 1 kg of supplement through winter.

Hinds, weaners and R2 stags are kept at Outram, with the stags run at the Clinton farm. Animals are generally kept in age/social



Deer 101 attendees in a healthy fodder beet winter crop at Black Forest Park.

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Deer 101: continued

groupings, with mob sizes varying from about 100 for 2-year-olds, 100–200 for weaners, 150–200 for mixed age stags and up to 250 for mixed age hinds.

Both farms use winter crops and they aim for winter growth rates in weaners of at least 150g/day. Currie said they would love to be able to put all deer on winter crop since they do so well on it and it protects soils on the rest of the farm. However that's not practicable and the larger or growing animals are prioritised, getting baleage with the standing crop. The crops are part of a 10-year pasture renewal programme. "The planning for each year's crops starts 12 months ahead," he said. A typical rotation might be from fodder beet to barley, then oats and an Italian ryegrass.

Currie is considering using a wintering shed for adult stags at Clinton. He's not entirely convinced of the benefits yet, but is trialling some fodder beet that's suitable for lifting and using over winter with cereal silage in a deer wintering shed. He said sheds are fine for dairying "because they can afford it". For deer, they would make most economic sense for velvetting stags.

The crops for this winter weren't that great, thanks to the effects of drought. "If we have a very cold, wet winter we could be in trouble," he said. Fodder beet did tend to sit out a drought better than, say swedes, he added. "The beet just sits there and waits for rain, but the swedes can get hammered by aphids if it's dry."

Wintering – general tips

- Keep animals in age/social groupings when they're on winter crop.
- Deer are real creatures of habit and don't like you messing with their routines – that's especially important when you're managing them on crops.
- Crops, and structures like bale feeders, help shelter deer during bad weather.
- If it turns cold and wet, increase their feed allowance because they'll need more just to stay warm. And give them wider breaks.
- Deer will happily lie down among kale stalks – the root structure of kale helps hold soil together.
- Deer can be unpredictable with fodder beet; sometimes they'll eat all the leaf first, other times they ignore the leaf and go for the bulb.
- Within a deer herd, different stock classes can complement each other well. For example, you'll get better utilisation if you give weaners first pick and follow them with post-roar stags.
- Even flat paddocks get wallows – watch out for new ones and take action if they're connected to a waterway.
- Because deer hair is hollow it is somewhat resistant to shocks, so keep your electric fencing tight – and hot!
- Graze a crop progressively down slope as recommended, but watch out for impatient stags trying to jump over the break to get to the good stuff waiting further down.



Richard Currie: If conditions allowed he'd love to put all stock onto winter crops.

Wintering – what works well at Black Forest

- Block grazing fodder beet gives you poor utilisation, but when grazing it, make the initial break fairly generous and don't try and make them eat it all before the break is shifted.
- During transition to a winter crop, feed baleage in an adjacent paddock; once they're well cottoned onto the crop, feed the supplement in the crop paddock using a ring feeder.
- Doing a daily shift isn't right for everyone but it works well at Black Forest. While it's more labour intensive, it does keep you in touch with the animals and paddock conditions.
- Shift breaks at the same time each morning, ideally when it's sunny and dry.
- Black Forest is using some lifting varieties of fodder beet. When lifted the leaf is cut off and fed separately. The bulbs keep well as long as they're dry.

Andrews Farm overview

Andrews Farm – one of four properties making up the family business – is at Kokonga near Ranfurly. It's owned by Dave and Judy Andrews and managed by their daughter and son-in-law Cassie and Sean Becker.

The whole operation winters 20,000 stock units and has five or six fulltime staff. Venison only makes up about 6–8 percent of the entire business, although 140 velvetting stags are adding to the contribution from deer.

The 1,300 deer stock units include 580 red hinds on a separate breeding property, about two-thirds going to a terminal sire. About 540 post-rut weaned finishers were still due to come to Andrews Farm when the group visited. There was still a mob of about 100 cull hinds that should have gone to the works by then, but that was being delayed thanks to Covid issues. They also had 90 yearling hinds with the stag and about 30 replacement velvetters on this farm.

Sean Becker said the deer finishing slots in nicely with the lamb finishing (the main earner) that follows through summer. They also run about 180 breeding cows, 320 fattening steers and a few replacement heifers.

Johne's disease has been an issue in the deer. They've dealt with this through testing and culling, as well as using Johne's-resistant genetics from Peel Forest. Being a climatically challenging



Sean Becker: Deer and lamb complement each other well.



Replacement hinds at Andrews Farm.

environment, they are careful not to overly stress young weaners and trigger yersiniosis. That's another reason why post-rut weaning is favoured, although fawning percentages are not so good with the later weaning.

The property visited by the Deer 101 group is about 450 hectares with 135 ha deer fenced. Part of it is irrigated although the ability to irrigate is restricted somewhat by river flows that have been affected by the region's drought. The family has owned it for 20 years and in that time have made many improvements, including reticulated stock water to some areas.

Pugging in winter isn't an issue because any mud is usually frozen, Becker explained, although erosion can still happen at play sites. That can all change as it starts to thaw out from August. The cold winters – it doesn't get above -5°C some days – provide other challenges such as freezing the stock water lines in the ground. Ice needs breaking daily on the troughs, while a tractor is used to do the same thing where deer get their water from ponds.

He said it's a challenge balancing the need to let deer exhibit their natural behaviour by creating wallows, and the requirements of rules to keep stock fenced out of wet or low-lying areas and protect critical source areas.

In such a cool, dry environment the objective for winter crops for the growing deer is just to keep them ticking over at 90–130 g/day before they get going in spring, the youngstock putting on 300–500 g/day when conditions are right. Winter crops include fodder beet and kale undersown with ryecorn.

Becker said the deer will only tolerate crop for about 85 days through winter. As it warms up and the days lengthen in spring, they really want to be somewhere else. He said any additional supplement for deer before the spring growth switch is flicked on in August tends to be wasted. One thing they have to look out for is leaf regrowth on fodder beet in spring, which can cause pulpy kidney if deer get into it.

Not all fodder beet varieties cope with the heavy frosts, with some low-ME types being killed by the cold and turning black. Using varieties with a medium-density bulb seems to work.

Crop planning needs to be done carefully – considerations like paddock layout and risk of nutrient loss into waterways dictate what paddocks are chosen.

Ice in his veins

Sometimes you forget people have lives outside farming. We were reminded of this in the nicest way with a One News sports item on 30 June about the Becker family's dynasty in the sport of curling. Sean, who skipped the New Zealand men's curling team at the 2006 Winter Olympics in Turin, Italy, is part of a third generation of Beckers to excel in the sport. Two of Sean's siblings – Bridget and Scott – have also represented New Zealand in curling. Their father Peter Becker, who was the focus of the item, is a legend in the sport with more than 50 years' involvement as a player, coach, selector and manager. This year Peter became the first Kiwi to be inducted into the World Curling Federation's Hall of Fame for his contributions to the international development of the sport.



That's lunch!

Attendees at the Deer 101 day were treated to a superb venison lunch courtesy of DINZ executive chef Graham Brown (inset, taking a well-earned breather). The four dishes featured included:

- Venison short ribs with Yakinuki glaze and Asian slaw
- Venison burgers with red onion marmalade with stout and chocolate
- Barbeque leg fillet with Louisiana spice rub, kumara and black bean salsa and avocado cilantro cream
- Red berry tea smoked venison with red beets and goat's cheese salad



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Deer 101: continued



A burning question

At this time of year Hound Burn (arrowed above) would normally be flowing, but the prolonged dry spell meant the bed was dry by the end of April.

Sean Becker said fencing ephemeral streams like this can be a real quandary. Fence too close, thereby keeping more grazing available, and you risk the fences getting blown out in the winter floods that can rage from bank to bank.

Put the fencing higher, on the terraces, and you lose a lot of grazing. Sean said they'll fence conservatively with wide buffers, but at least let sheep graze the bed when there's no water flow. But the deer like the environment too, especially the shade provided by the willows – so would it be OK for them to graze this area?

Here's where the value of getting regional council officials out on the farm to look at real-world issues paid off. One of the Otago Regional Council attendees put it like this: "Technically, it wouldn't be permitted to graze deer here when it's dry. Pragmatically, if you do [graze them], it's not going to be chased up."

Winter crop planning exercise

The MPI and regional council staff earned their nice

lunch with an exercise where they had to plan a winter grazing programme for a fodder beet paddock (pictured below). They all showed they'd been picking up on the day's lessons, noting that they would:

- graze progressively down slope
- use 7–10-day breaks
- identify and avoid grazing a couple of critical source areas further down the paddock
- provide an adjacent "Plan B" paddock for shelter in case of severe weather (in this case a nearby paddock with a shelter belt running perpendicular to the prevailing weather).

Becker said this crop had grown poorly and the expected yield was probably barely half what he'd usually expect. "I'm too scared to measure it."

He said the paddock had only two troughs, but others could be added to accommodate the breaks used. The incoming weaners were likely to go onto the paddock in June. ■



Sean Becker said he used to use plastic bags tied to the electric fence as a visual cue for weaners getting used to break feeding. Now plastic bags are no longer a thing, an extra wide strip of tape serves the same purpose.

Practical environment handbook launching soon

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

A companion to the 2018 Deer Industry Environmental Management Code of Practice will be launched soon through the Deer Industry New Zealand website. *The Deer Industry Environmental Management Handbook* is a practical, online-only companion to the code.

BEING ONLINE ONLY means the handbook can be kept continually up to date and helps reduce the blizzard of paper that ends up in your mailboxes – this is about the environment after all!

The 2018 Code of Practice provides an excellent overview of environment issues particular to deer farming and has hundreds of great tips for on-farm actions to improve environmental outcomes. The environmental management handbook takes this a step further with a series of Action Plan modules focusing on particular environmental risk areas, such as waterways, soil erosion or sheds and yards.

Each Action Plan module contains plenty of background and tips, plus a template that can be completed on screen in editable PDF files and then saved to your computer. On the Action Plan template you can:

- Set out simple goals
- Describe risk areas (eg, streambank erosion) and assess how high the risk is (see illustration on right)
- Document what you've already done to address the risks
- Document what work you still have planned.

There are plenty of examples provided in each module to get you started.

A "Toolbox" of farm-level sections is also provided. This includes things like documenting a farm description and doing a farm map. Once these are done, it will be easier to work through the Action Plans.

If you haven't done a Farm Environment Plan yet, working through this handbook will get most of the work done.

The handbook has been put together by environmental consultant Nicola McGrouther (also facilitator for the Southland

Environmental Advance Party) and Phil Stewart, based on a comprehensive draft handbook created by Hawke's Bay environmental consultant Emma Buchanan. Rebecca Norling, DINZ producer projects, is doing the design work and making sure the modules are easy to navigate and complete on screen.

We'll be announcing the launch through the NZDFA Stagline, DINZ eNews and other channels as soon as the handbook is up online and ready to use. Needless to say we'll welcome your feedback and will be able to update content and functionality as farmers start to use the resource. ■

ACTION PLAN | Phosphorus

04 How high are the risks from P loss?

Record the risks from P loss. We've started with some examples below. Tailor this to your situation using the template at the end. See the "Risk Assessment" module for how to assess level of risk:

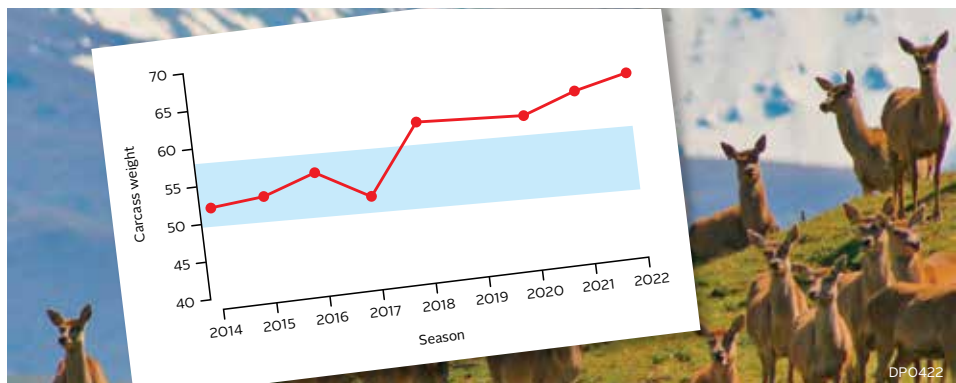
Activity/location examples	Risk assessment	Comment (make a note of anything specific to your place)
Excess P loss from sediment runoff into waterways	○ ● ○	Using fenced buffer zones
Riverbank erosion putting sediment and P into the waterway	● ○ ○	Only happens once every 10 years in big floods. Have planted bush willows to hold the banks
P Runoff through critical source areas from a newly cultivated paddock	○ ○ ●	This year the cultivated paddock is next to a creek and I've had to re-grass so all of the critical source areas are exposed if we get a downpour.
Excessively high Olsen P levels in soil tests of some paddocks which means any runoff of soil will put higher levels of P into the waterway.	○ ● ○	Need to change my fertiliser application in that paddock next year.

The Action Plan modules can be filled out on screen, with records such as risk assessment made with the click of a mouse.

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Board appointments

Jacqueline Rowarth and **Hamish Fraser** are the producer appointees to the DINZ board.

Professor Jacqueline Rowarth CNZM, CRSNZ, FNZIAHS has a Bachelors degree in Agricultural Science with honours in Environmental Agriculture, and a PhD in Soil Science from Massey University. She has worked in research, education and management with AgResearch, Lincoln University, Unitec in Auckland, The University



of Melbourne, Massey University, University of Waikato and the Environmental Protection Authority. In addition, she has held government-appointed governance roles on the boards of Crop and Food Research and AGMARDT. She is currently a farmer-elected member of the Board of Directors for DairyNZ and of Ravensdown Co-operative Ltd and holds the role of Adjunct Professor at Lincoln University.

Jacqueline is a Past President of the New Zealand Institute of Agricultural and Horticultural Science, and of the New Zealand Grassland Association. In 2008 she was awarded Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to agricultural science; in 2009 she was given the inaugural award of Agricultural Personality of the Year by Federated Farmers; and in 2010 she was selected as the Agricultural Communicator of the Year by the NZ Guild of Agricultural Journalists and Communicators. Jacqueline is a frequent contributor to public debate and remains committed to dispelling the myths around food production.

Hamish Fraser is the CEO of the Fraser family business, working alongside other family members. They have diverse farming interests in South Canterbury, covering deer, dairy and sheep and beef along with their preeminent hunting business in Wanaka targeting the luxury end of the market.



Before the family business role, Hamish established a career in rural banking, managing the largest portfolio in the branch and winning a national award for lending growth. To complement strong financial skills, he developed business management expertise as a farm management consultant for McFarlane Rural Business.

He has a Bachelors degree in Agricultural Science with First Class Honours and governance experience including various family advisory board roles, independent trustee for the past 7 years on the NZ Rural Leadership Trust board, the organisation that delivers the Kellogg and Nuffield programmes.

Hamish is proud and passionate about the deer industry, and wants to ensure a profitable, and growing industry for his generation and future participants, and to continue the great work being done on attracting and retaining the best people into the industry. ■

From 50m rolls to 500m rolls and bigger, Bayonet has you covered

CELEBRATING 50 YEARS in business this year, Bayonet is NZ family-owned and operated, based in Tauranga and home to the only machine of its kind in New Zealand – a brand new UMC Fixed Lokk Machine (pictured). Fully automated from start-up to label insertion, this fabricator can produce high-quality Fixed Knot and Kiwi Knot rolls of 1000+ metres with ease.

Having the ability to produce both Fixed Knot and Kiwi Knot fabricated fence from the same machine gives our customers greater flexibility, ensuring the right fencing solution for their situation. We can produce **50 m** rolls for hobby and lifestyle blocks, **100 m** rolls for farmers, **500 m** rolls for large farmers and contractors with material handling equipment and, if you can handle them, **1000+ metre** rolls are no problem.

We have been experiencing high levels of demand for 500 m rolls of Deer Netting as they have advantages that shorter lengths don't have. Recently, a fencing contractor we've been working closely with installed 2 km of deer fencing in just 4.5 hours! The project only took 4 rolls of Fixed Knot 13 x 190 x 30 x 500.

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Deer industry well represented in Otago planning

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Otago Regional Council (ORC) is working closely with the deer industry and other primary sector groups as it builds its Land and Water Regional Plan. While this might sound a little dry, it's a significant partnership. It will ensure the special needs of our industry are properly understood when it comes to the way regional councils manage natural resources like water and soil in order to meet the requirements of the 2020 formal National Policy Statement for Fresh Water Management. There is the opportunity for other councils to undertake similar projects when they're ready.

AS PART OF its Land and Water Regional Plan, ORC is carrying out an Economic Work Programme. This looks at the possible impacts of different "actions" (the way natural resources are used) on different types of business. How would profitability, production and employment be affected by things like abstraction (taking water) or contaminant discharges into water, for example?

This industry and economics-focused "farmer/grower workstream" involving the deer industry is one of four wide-ranging areas being worked on by ORC. There is also a "catchment story" stream, which captures the community side of the project, while the Te Ōhanga ki Kāi Tahu stream led by iwi groups will be focusing more on the impact on mana whenua and other Māori.

ORC senior economist Ann Yang explains that the potential scope of Te Ōhanga ki Kāi Tahu might include a historical narrative on the place of wai māori in the Kāi Tahu economy in Otago, and how this has evolved over time – the analysis of the economic, social and cultural consequences of these changes for Kāi Tahu.

A regional economic analysis will set out the broader flow-on impacts of the ORC Land and Water Regional Plan. This will include a look at the way the regional economy uses resources like water and land, and the interconnection amongst industries. The value of natural resources like these will be reflected by how the economy relies on them and the analysis will determine likely impacts if regulations are adopted.

DINZ part of the planning mix

The analysis is complex with a lot of moving parts and the deer industry, represented by DINZ producer manager Lindsay Fung, environmental stewardship manager Sara Elmes and former producer manager Tony Pearse, is an important part of the mix.

In addition to their broad knowledge of the way deer interact with their environment, this group has, through Tony Pearse, deep local knowledge and industry experience going back decades.

Environmental consultant Emma Moran is working with ORC on its Economic Work programme and also did an earlier report for Environment Southland (the Southland Economic Project, 2017), which traversed similar territory. Moran says the involvement of industry organisations like DINZ, providing an interface so councils can be assured of good-quality farm data and

industry knowledge, is a real good-news story on collaboration.

For this process to work well and be meaningful, the planners and analysts need some decent data on real-world farming, including deer. Thanks to a four-year project being carried out by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), that's exactly what they are getting. This is a separate but very important part of the ORC story.

Up until about 10 years ago, MPI and its predecessor used to keep a finger on the economic pulse of farming through Farm Monitoring Reports. These were limited to a few dozen representative types of farm (deer farms were included) but were mainly focused on economic performance.

The discontinuation of these reports left something of an information vacuum for central and local government policy makers when they're considering changes that might affect farm businesses.

Benchmarking is plugging information gaps

A four-year programme is well advanced to put that to rights. MPI's Farm Monitoring and Benchmarking Project is set to gather comprehensive data on not just dozens but hundreds, even thousands of farm businesses. The project will bring together physical/production, financial and (for the first time) environmental data from the sheep and beef, deer, dairy, horticulture and arable sectors.

Set to end next year, the project aims to involve about 2,000 farms. The data is anonymised before government departments or councils see it. The secret sauce to this project is that it's being done in collaboration with the relevant industry organisations, who act as an intermediary, using their "local" knowledge to recruit farms to the cause and ensuring there is a good range of farm systems, sizes, geographic locations and environmental conditions represented.

In our case of course it's been DINZ doing this go-between work, driven initially by farm performance manager Phil McKenzie, and now managed by Sara Elmes with input from Lindsay Fung.

While many might run a mile at the thought of having to supply a whole lot of data, this partnership has a tempting sweetener.



Farmed hill and high country around Queenstown is one of three areas in Otago where deer farming data will be collected.

It comes in the form of an MPI-funded package of business data, environment planning support (ie, a free Overseer® analysis and Farm Environment Plan) and tailored recommendations for improving business performance, something that's been promoted to deer farmers over the past year or so under the in-house banner of the Natural Knowledge Project, initiated by McKenzie.

Matt Newman, farm monitoring team leader at MPI, says the overall target includes about 160 deer farms nationwide, which could represent upwards of 20 percent of all deer farms. "This will give us a great base of environmental, physical and financial data which we can update and watch trends emerging among smaller, repeatable samples." He adds that the data will also provide a great insight into the industry for DINZ.

Newman says so far about 1,000 farms have completed their input and environment planning nationwide, including about 60 deer farms. He says projects like these take a while to pick up momentum but he's confident they'll have close to 2,000 farms on board by this time next year.

He says the project is designed to inform policy and ensure that the potential impacts of new regulations can be understood by having a rich vein of up-to-date farm business profiles to tap into.

The data is collected in various ways. In some cases (including DINZ) the industry organisation takes an active part, but fertiliser companies and farm environmental consultants are also contracted to provide Farm Environment Plans that are part of the package.

Programme already showing value

And even while the project is still underway, it's already proving its worth. Newman says initiatives like He Waka Eke Noa weren't mapped out at the time the benchmarking was begun, but notes that the anonymised data will provide a great testing ground for the impacts of emissions pricing options. While designed initially to feed into central government policy and planning, Newman says the benchmarking data is also proving extremely useful at regional government level – which takes us back to the ORC and its Economic Work Programme.

Newman says the ORC has been a frontrunner and other councils at different stages of formulating their water quality/quantity rules may also have the opportunity to use the anonymised farm benchmarking data from their own regions. Like Moran, he stresses the collaboration through industry organisations is a key to success.

So far, about 100 farms are involved in the farmer/grower workstream, with an aim for 20–25 deer farms to be included. Yang says 19 deer farms are currently signed up, with 15 having provided data by last month. The project will model the impacts of various mitigations and management changes via Overseer and Farmax.

Yang says the MPI benchmarking project has greatly helped the ORC make good progress, with the data collection phase of its farmer/grower workstream almost complete. Analysis of the potential impacts of rule changes on farm businesses will start soon (this doesn't include emissions pricing – it's more about water).

Emma Moran explains that DINZ helped guide the selection of deer farms for the project, covering three main regions in Otago. "Each has its own climate, topography and soils that influence deer production systems." The three areas are in the Upper Lakes district, South Otago and inland Otago.

Moran says the collaboration with DINZ has meant they have a good understanding of the special seasonal requirements and behaviour patterns of deer that distinguish them from sheep and cattle. She notes that "for specialist deer farms, maximising pasture quality and meeting seasonal variations can be achieved by using larger mobs of velvet stags as 'cattle by proxy' to clear and control poorer pasture".

Yang agrees that the partnership with DINZ has been valuable. "We are constantly reminded that no two farms are the same; and in order to produce policies that work in the real world and can be applied to real farms, it is vital to base the analysis on real farms and real systems."

And just to show that it's not all dry economic analysis and number crunching, Yang reveals she's become more engaged with the deer industry than you'd think: "Also," she concludes, "deer are cute looking and delicious to eat." ■

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Manual deer crush

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Doubling down on commitment to United States

US venison sales have been getting fresh impetus, but despite Covid restrictions easing in that country, there are still challenges, writes *Deer Industry News* contributor, **Richard Rennie**.

Alliance Group: East coast preferred right now

Despite having Covid restrictions considerably looser than those in New Zealand, the US foodservice market still lags behind where it was before the pandemic. Consumer concern over inflation and the cost of living is now tending to eclipse Covid concerns. The country is experiencing one of the highest rates of inflation in the Western world, restricting consumer purchasing power and spending on non-essential activities.

Katrina Allan and Terry O'Connell of Alliance Group have been overseeing the launch of ground mince "bricks" into the US market. The product provides an ideal entry point for consumers, given the novelty of venison.



Alliance's ground mince bricks under the Four Seasons brand are providing an ideal entry point for US consumers unfamiliar with venison.

The company had enjoyed a good start in the United States before Covid, with 2020 sales 2.5 times more than in 2019. In 2021, first-quarter sales alone were 1.5 times the entire 2019 sales volume.

Both say sales this year are looking positive and the company is well positioned to take advantage of cost-conscious consumers who still want a quality eating experience.

The ground mince bricks were launched into two major retail chains on the East and West coasts, with a "5-pounder" brick aimed at foodservice. Despite the post-Covid lag in a lift for the restaurant/takeaway sector, the company is optimistic the mince product offers a good value proposition when consumers are particularly cautious about spending.

O'Connell says with inflation causing menu prices to rise, chefs are focused on trimming costs where they can without compromising on quality or losing any uniqueness in their food offerings.

"Menu items featuring ground venison help on both accounts and we are anticipating a lift in ground sales as a result," he says.

Alliance had also marketed a loin steak last year, but it struggled to gain enough sales to hold its valuable shelf space.

"However, it does have the potential to succeed as a foodservice item, because of its labour- and waste-saving advantage. We are looking at presenting variations of the steak to some of our larger end-user consumers."

All sales remain frozen, with chilled trade in any red meat product out of New Zealand a fraught one given the ongoing issues around shipping and containers. That situation is likely to continue for some time yet.

"Where possible we are avoiding the West Coast, with greater focus on Philadelphia and to the east. Supply chain issues remain really tough."



Alliance is targeting cities like Philadelphia and further east for its US venison sales while supply chain issues remain on the west coast.

Mountain River Venison: free-range relationship works well

The lift in red meat prices in the United States is helping venison's position as an alternative to the beef and lamb products consumers are more familiar with, as the usual price differential starts to shrink.

Mountain River Venison director John Sadler says the company is experiencing strong sales growth in its high-value venison products including venison "Tomahawk" steaks, steak medallions and breakfast sausages. He's encouraged by US consumers' keenness to try a high-quality, grass-fed red meat option.

"Foodservice has also rebounded quickly after the pandemic. People are keen to try something that has a high health value, with a good story behind it."

The Tomahawk steak's target market is affluent, educated consumers and its single-serve, five-ounce size is accessible and simple to cook.

Mountain River's relationship with US free-range meat company Force of Nature is hitting the right notes, sharing strong production and environmental values with a company that requires free-range, non-factory farmed quality meat products in its portfolio.

"They are very focused on what they are trying to achieve and take a disciplined approach to their marketing."



Force of Nature's venison Tomahawk steak: appeals to US tastes.

Mountain River has been making a series of farm videos in New Zealand for Force of Nature to deploy through social media in coming months.

The company's joint venture with Terra Pacific Marketing has helped keep the company in close contact with its market, and able to continue development projects particularly over the past two years when travel out of New Zealand has been so limited.

Sadler says Mountain River is doubling down on its focus at the top end of the US market, with distribution through Force of Nature, and high-end gourmet business, D'Artagnan.

The New Jersey-based company was initially focused on foodservice products, but during the pandemic pivoted to online retail sales to consumers compelled to eat at home more often.

Sadler maintains that as New Zealand venison producers continue to face ever-growing costs, the future of the industry lies in its ability to deliver consistently high-quality, high-value cuts to more affluent consumers.

Meanwhile, like many in the sector, he continues to grapple with shipping uncertainties.

"I would not say it is necessarily getting better, although we have at least caught up. Delays in transit have reduced by 20–30 percent which is good – until the next crisis comes along! Your relationship with your shipping company is more important than ever right now."

FirstLight: tempting consumers from beef mince to venison

FirstLight's general manager for venison, Matt Gibson, says he is highly encouraged by sales data coming out of the United States that shows the industry as a whole has doubled its sales volumes through both the United States and China in April this year,

compared with a year ago.

At a company level that is being experienced with exceptionally strong sales of FirstLight's high-quality venison mince brick.

"It also shows venison companies have done what they said they would do – reduce that reliance on the European foodservice sector."

The one-pound brick has gained strong popularity among shoppers in the Whole Foods retail chain as a quality, high-protein, lean alternative to conventional beef mince.

"Our consumers find that once they have tried it, they don't want to go back to beef mince. The leanness – about 95 percent fat free compared with most beef mince at 65 percent – means it carries flavours very well, particularly in traditional dishes like bolognese sauce or chilli con carne."

The mince product has leveraged well off FirstLight's established reputation for its Wagyu beef products. It plays a critical role for farmer suppliers, in providing a foundation product to anchor sales of higher-end cuts.

"The mince's success means that is about 23 percent of the carcass right there that is not dropping into lower-value commodity product."

Gibson says leg cuts are next in FirstLight's sights. Work is well underway to market a leg steak sold with a butter pack, as is done domestically in New Zealand in conjunction with Lewis Road Creamery.

"We are in the final stages of nailing down a high-quality butter supplier who can meet all the criteria for being grass fed, free range and antibiotic/hormone free."

FirstLight's meatball product is also selling well, particularly through outlets offering cooked meatballs as a meal option in ready-to-eat meal serveries.

Efforts to use social media more for promotion are also reaping returns, particularly when linked with gourmet food influencers.

"We ran a 'cooking with fire' session one night in tandem with our Wagyu products and a room full of chefs and influencers from California, all cooking on open fire grills, and gained a lot of coverage from this."

With a strong post-Covid upswing in the United States, Gibson is optimistic the range will continue to sell well, while a gradual drop in the NZ dollar also plays well into exporters' margins, over time.

Shipping challenges remain, with 20-foot frozen and chilled containers still difficult to source. "[The issue] hasn't gone away, but we are to getting by." ■



Matt Gibson, FirstLight, speaking at the recent DINZ roadshow in Palmerston North.

Asian efforts reaping rewards for Alliance

by Richard Rennie, *Deer Industry News* contributing writer

Alliance has continued to double down on its work in Asia with its venison products, reporting solid lifts in product sales. It says these are directly attributable to targeted marketing, utilising both traditional bricks and mortar outlets and online e-commerce platforms.

IN CHINA, THE company's presence was boosted late last year thanks to participation at the CIME show, part of the China International Meat Industry Week. Held in the Qingdao International Convention Centre, the show has been running for 19 years. Last year's event hosted 1,000 exhibitors and received over 300,000 delegates from across the world.

Alliance Group's marketing manager for Asia, Ethel Wong, says the show proved an ideal venue to showcase the company's Grand Farm and Pure South venison and lamb products to delegates.

Products showcased include venison leg meat cubes, minced venison, venison brisket cubes and venison shabu shabu, a roll suitable for Chinese hot pot cuisine. Created using the same technique as a lamb roll, the cut offers a traditional way to introduce consumers to venison, which is still a relatively new meat type for many Chinese consumers.

Wong says interest at the massive exhibit was strong, aided by a taste offering that had venison meat cubes grilled on a hot pan and sprinkled with a common barbecue spice mix and skewered for serving.



The 2021 CIME expo – Alliance hopes to return to the event in 2022.

Alliance hopes to return to the 2022 CIME expo, provided the pandemic situation allows movement.

As a market, China continues to exhibit strong growth signals. It's now the fourth-largest venison market, totalling 1700 t to the year ended September 2021 and showing 27 percent growth despite Covid restrictions.

It presents significant opportunities for venison, given Chinese consumers' predilection for eating out and trying new food types in a social environment.

"We are targeting cities in the top five provinces for venison consumption in China. These cities include Yan Cheng (Jiangsu), Hangzhou (Zhejiang) and Beijing. Yan Cheng has a major deer conservation reserve, hence the locals have relatively more knowledge about deer in general," she says.

The market launch has also included listing on China's second largest e-commerce platform, JD.com.

Alliance's venison roll and venison brisket cubes have also proven successful, with each gaining over 500 online reviews and 95 percent of them positive.

"Venison roll is selling tremendously well in January leading up to the Spring Festival (Chinese Lunar New Year), while brisket cubes pick up sales later on."

Wong says the success on JD.com can be attributed to an information-dense product page, highlighting venison's benefits, and its pristine, high-quality source.

The company continues to invest in search engine optimisation and targeting of specific consumer groups where venison is often recognised as a highly nourishing dish, even more so than lamb.

"The top three factors driving JD.com shoppers' meat purchases are nourishment, novelty and a healthier meat option. A number noted they have never consumed venison but are willing to try for one of those factors."

With the recent easing of lockdown in Shanghai, people are now returning to work in their offices and businesses, but dining out is still prohibited.

"Dining at home will still be a large part of most Chinese lifestyles for months to come. This would certainly be detrimental to food service outlets, particularly fine-dining restaurants."

Growth in Taiwan

Sales efforts in Taiwan have also been rewarded in the past year, with two food service promotions lifting sales by over 200 percent, driven primarily by venison striploin sales.

The launch with the Pure South brand was over December-January into three Japanese-style Yakatori chains in Taipei, Kaohsiung and Taichung.

Different cuts including racks, striploin and tenderloin were used in each chain, with 12 restaurants showcasing the cuts.

"Thanks to those chains having good media contacts, we managed to obtain excellent media coverage over the promotion," says Wong.

Promotion included the story of how venison was commonly consumed in Hokkaido, Japan, during winter. This leveraged off a

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Velvet marketers focus on spring campaigns

by Richard Rennie, *Deer Industry News* contributing writer

Velvet marketers will make the most of an impending lift in travel restrictions and the spring season marking the start of Asian gift-giving festivals, ensuring campaigns and contacts are primed for optimal results in coming months.

DINZ MANAGER, MARKETS Rhys Griffiths says despite an ongoing issue with shipping and logistics that shows little sign of abating, velvet markets have held up well in China and South Korea over the past year.

For those countries' domestic velvet producers, lockdowns and internal logistical difficulties have made for a challenging season.

"Many companies have also faced challenges around product development, with initiatives taking a back seat due to shutdowns and lack of access to facilities like labs," he says.

He has been looking forward to helping re-establish face-to-face contact with buyers and marketers in South Korea in early July.

Campaign planning with South Korea's companies for their respective Chuseok festival promotions (this year 9–12 September) is firmly in mind. The lunar holiday is a significant gift-giving event, alongside assorted Moon festivals and China's "Golden Week", a celebration of the Chinese Communist Party's foundation.

Recent work has included translation of a velvet information brochure into simplified Chinese and South Korean, highlighting the value of quality velvet product for contributing to health and disease immunity.

It provides consumers with the latest science updates on discoveries about velvet antler's value as an immunity booster.

Preliminary research funded by the velvet industry and AgResearch has focused on the effects deer velvet extracts can have on the body's innate and adaptive immune responses. The work showed velvet can have a measurable effect upon immune function and could pave the way for supporting verified health claims for deer velvet with further work down the track.

"NZ Trade and Enterprise has also really stepped up for the sector, with workshops on how to better connect with South Korean consumers and build good relationships up there."

Here at home, work is ongoing to fine tune the inaugural version of VelTrak, with DINZ taking on board feedback on the traceability system from buyers and farmers.

Griffiths will accompany DINZ's general manager quality assurance Rob Gregory, who is heading a roadshow in August aimed at informing velvet buyers about improvements to the system.

Meantime, like all primary industry export sectors, the challenges of shipping delays and logistics remain for velvet exporters and overseas buyers.

"These problems aren't likely to go away quickly. On top of that, some of our big-city markets in China could still be vulnerable to further lockdowns." ■



The immune function brochure translated into Korean.

Alliance in Asia: continued

Taiwanese passion for Japanese food and food customs.

Wong says Pure South also highlighted how New Zealand-sourced venison is a high-quality, excellent protein source, coming from a pristine environment as free-range livestock grown without steroids or growth promotants.

Additional efforts have focused on launching venison into the home consumer market in Taiwan, using a Pure South retail pack

marketed through Gourmet Partner's e-commerce site. Gourmet Partner is also listing it with Breeze Supermarket, a high-end chain in Taipei.

Korea remains a new market for Alliance. Lamb is the main focus now, but a business development project is examining opportunities in that country. ■

Netherdale era drawing to a close after four decades

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

David Stevens stops and thinks for a while about this question. What's been the highlight of a successful career spanning more than 40 years and building one of the country's pre-eminent velvet genetics studs?

"WHEN PEOPLE COME to your place from all over New Zealand and they want to purchase our animals – well that's always been special to us and the highlight of our year. It's very humbling," David says.

David and Lynley Stevens have already sold their stud hinds from the Netherdale Red Deer Stud, and all of their R1s (male and female), to South Canterbury's Hudson family.

The Hudsons intend to start their own stud, building on Netherdale's formidable genetic base. The Stevenses have retained just 40 hinds at Netherdale, which David has mated to a rather special two-year-old stag he identified last year. But these animals too will be sold. There will be a 2023 Netherdale sire auction (their 36th) and possibly a final sale in 2024 to sell the remaining 3-year-old sire stags.

David is confident the genetic lines he's developed are going to a good home. "The Hudsons [Donald, Kathy and Ben] have got the knowledge and enthusiasm that it takes to run a good stud and I've been enjoying working with them."

Why now? It was really a case of the right people coming along at the right time and Ben has the ability to take the stud to another level, David says. And although it wasn't totally the deciding factor, he said his health and the constantly changing business environment with a lot more paperwork and compliance demands, not to mention the looming challenge of emissions reductions, also entered the equation.

A lot's changed since David and Lynley started the Netherdale journey in 1979. "I was still in my late 20s!"

While it's been trying at times, David says it's been an amazing journey. "We've become friends with a lot of people. We all helped each other in those early days and we were grateful for the support we received from people like Bob Swann and Brian Duggan. There were also a few rogues in the mix! We didn't get everything right but had lots of fun, and it has been a privilege to work with such an amazing animal."

David reflects that the average velvet weights of Netherdale sale sires were 4 kg in 2002 and have doubled to 8.36 kg this year. "Thirty years ago we didn't even have the velvet on display at sales – just a photo in the catalogue if you were lucky."

"Those huge velvet weight gains probably cannot go on forever but there is still plenty of opportunity for genetic improvement. There will also be more research and changes to things like the timing of cutting and, dare I say it, grading."

"Buyers are now a lot more discerning about the genetics they're investing in, and should insist on DNA, pedigree and breeding value records as a matter of course. Also what takes place on sale day is quite different to the 1980s. The purchaser is making a substantial investment so we need to provide as much information as possible."

He's satisfied that they are leaving an industry that's in great shape after a sustained run of 6–8 good years. "There are always the rough patches, but the industry is in a good place now." It's also in a constant state of change: "I never thought I'd see half of our venison going to the United States market and 60 percent of our velvet going into China – through the front door. The



Sale days like this one at Netherdale in 2016 will become a thing of the past.

development of the Cervena® appellation was a good move for the industry.”

One of the secrets to the velvet industry’s growth and strength has been its early development of a quality assurance framework and strong self regulation through the NVSB. “If you get it wrong as a velvet producer, you’re dealt with. Other industries could learn from the way we have done things.”

David’s always been happy to lend his considerable experience to the deer industry. He served on the former DFA council, including time as chair, SAP chair, Quality Assurance chair and on the NVSB. He also spent many years on the Southland DFA committee and is a Life Member of both local and national DFAs. In addition he’s been a regular contributor to rural radio over many years and for six years has served on the Environment Southland Regional Council.

But when it comes to industry representation he’s a strong believer in stepping back and giving the next generation room to establish themselves and take things forward.

David says he owes a lot to the family, who put up with a lack of Christmas holidays over many years as stud sales took priority. “Things have changed a lot in family farming businesses now, with more shared responsibilities and that’s a good thing.”

He and Lynley won’t be in a hurry to fill the vacuum left by the departing deer. Lynley runs a flock of Wiltshire sheep and that will continue. Part of a block can be leased to flower growers next door and rather than destocking straight away they have bought in a couple of hundred commercial weaner hinds to play with. Whatever they do, it’ll be a gradual wind-down.



Lynley and David Stevens at the 2015 Deer Industry Conference, where they received the Deer Industry Award in recognition of their contribution to deer farming.

“We still have two more sales and when that comes to an end it will be an enormous change in our lifestyle.”

And while he’s stepping out of the limelight over the next couple of years, David firmly believes that the industry he’s loved and worked in for most of his adult life has nowhere near reached its potential. “I hope people realise that there’s still so much to achieve.” ■



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Meet our winner!



At 15, Ella Hole is the youngest-ever* outright winner in the more than 20 years the deer industry photo awards have been held. Her entry “Content” that features on our cover caught the judges’ eye for its composition, sharpness and nice lighting – and the personality exuded by a happy hind with a mouthful of tucker.

ELLA LIVES WITH her parents Toni Morrison and Nathan Hole on a 70-hectare block near Geraldine in South Canterbury, where the family have been for 10 years. The block is about half native forest, with the balance used to run a small deer herd of 30 hinds and 30 velvetting stags, plus half a dozen sheep and a few cattle. “We don’t want to be too hard on the land, which is why we don’t carry too many stock,” Ella says.

She took the winning shot on a Nikon D3500 with 200mm macro lens, a camera she was given two years ago and helped spark her interest in photography. There are no photography courses at her school, Geraldine High School (GHS), but her grandfather John Morrison, also a keen photographer, has helped her out as she’s developed her skills.

Ella loves animals and farming, and is studying agriculture in Year 11 at GHS. She’s learning great practical skills at GHS’s Primary Industry Academy, which is run in conjunction with AgriLearn and Primary ITO. The course, which goes through to Year 13 includes on-farm placements and results in a National Certificate qualification.

She admits sheep are her first love – “the deer are more dad’s thing” – but she’s clearly developed an affinity with the deer as well. Although the animals are comfortable around her when she’s out with the camera, she stresses that they’re not pets and got the photos she entered when she was feeding out.

Ella had hesitated about entering after seeing the winning photos in last year’s MSD Animal Health/Allflex Deer Industry

Photo Competition. “Those photos were so good!” But she took the plunge and is glad she did. “I am so thrilled.”

*Back in 2016 Demi Lawrence, also 15, came close with a second placing. ■



Photo award winner Ella Hole, inset, and out photographing the hinds on her family’s South Canterbury farm.

Proposed NAIT levy hike trimmed back

A proposal put forward in January to increase the tag and slaughter levies used to part-fund NAIT was not well received and on 1 June NAIT Limited announced a smaller increase.

IT WILL INSTEAD revise its operational strategy under a reduced funding package “with an emphasis on delivering the core capabilities of a fit-for-purpose traceability system”. Additional services will be delivered using a “staged approach”.

Under the revised levy proposal the Crown/industry funding split of 35/65 percent will be maintained and the deer industry’s overall share of total industry contributions will remain at the previously agreed level of 2 percent.

Effective 1 July 2022, the cattle tag levy increased from \$0.90 to \$0.97 (the consultation proposal was \$1.35) and the cattle slaughter levy from \$0.50 to \$1.49 (the consultation proposal was \$1.77).

The Crown is increasing its contribution to \$4.34m per annum (from \$2.14m pa), while the deer industry is increasing its contribution to \$249,000 per annum, up from \$120,000 (the original proposal would have increased the deer total contribution to \$320,000).

DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat says DINZ provided strong feedback on the need to improve the accuracy of animal records and for a focus on core services. DINZ will absorb the increase for the remainder of this financial year, and then adjust the venison and velvet levies to cover the increased deer contribution from 1 October. ■

CWD review a reminder to keep defences up

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

It's scary reading. Chronic wasting disease (CWD) has never got within a stag's roar of New Zealand deer populations, but just reading about its impacts in other countries is enough to send a shiver down the industry's collective spine.

IF SOMETHING LIKE bovine Tb was equated to, say, Draco Malfoy (*Harry Potter* readers will get this), then CWD is Voldemort – on steroids.

A review of literature related to the risk of CWD to New Zealand, commissioned by DINZ from Epi-Insight's Eric Neumann, sets out in more measured language just what a potential threat CWD poses. It also underlines why New Zealand can never drop its biosecurity guard against the disease.

New Zealand has a long-standing CWD surveillance programme in place. It includes routine testing of samples collected from clinically healthy adult animals sent to meat processing plants. If an animal is showing clinical signs of neurological disease, samples are supplied for testing, with vets and farmers compensated for the samples.

CWD primer

Chronic wasting disease is part of the transmissible spongiform encephalopathy “family” of diseases. Others include scrapie and bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE, mad cow disease). It affects a range of cervid species, including the deer we farm in New Zealand. There's a long incubation period (up to 36 months) and clinical cases are infectious for up to 18 months before death inevitably occurs. It mainly spreads via direct contact between animals. Mineral licks are one means of transmission, as is the biological soup of various deer bodily fluids found in wallows. The misfolded proteins (prions) that cause the disease are extremely resilient in the environment and can be picked up in soil.

CWD was first found in 1967 in Colorado and as of 2019 was present in 26 US States (the US Centres for Disease Control and Prevention reports the number of states had grown to 27 by January 2022). The review notes that, to date, CWD has been reported from United States and Canada (wild and captive deer), Norway, Sweden and Finland (since 2016, in wild deer and moose), and South Korea (in elk imported from Canada).

The literature review says CWD seems to spread more readily where deer population densities are highest, particularly around meeting points such as wallows and mineral licks. Adult male deer seem to be the most prone to infection and spreading CWD because, it is speculated, they “get around” more than other groups.

The prion involved in the European cases seems different than the North American one and is described as “atypical CWD”.

The elephant in the CWD room is of course the risk to human



A white-tailed deer buck in Yellowstone National Park. CWD has been detected in most of the counties of Wyoming, Idaho and Montana that encompass the park.

health. It has never been detected in humans but the possibility of infection hasn't been ruled out. (Other animal species have been experimentally infected with CWD, so it's at least theoretically possible.) That unknown risk, combined with the very real experience of spread in both wild and captive deer populations, makes CWD an ongoing red-flag biosecurity risk.

Unlike diseases like foot and mouth, also thankfully kept at bay so far, CWD sticks around in the environment once it has got in the door. Foot and mouth disease is expensive and destructive to eradicate, but it has been done. That's unlikely with CWD, which is extremely persistent in the soil – it's especially attracted to clay particles. There's even evidence that it can be taken up from the soils by some plants and transferred to foliage, potentially able to infect animals that ate it (they can also ingest it directly with the small amounts of soil they consume with forage).

The only positive news in the review is that diagnostic techniques for CWD have improved “enormously” in the past 10–15 years, although it's still hard to diagnose in the pre-clinical stage.

Less encouraging is that in natural (wild) settings, anything short of total eradication of a deer population is ineffective for controlling CWD. And even if that's done, it's not clear how long the infectious prions will persist in the environment. The report concludes that these factors would make CWD management challenging in both natural and farmed settings.

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Cost headwinds hit carbon-neutral red meat

by Richard Rennie, *Deer Industry News* contributing writer

“Carbon neutral” marketing by most major meat companies has picked up in recent months, most recently with Silver Fern Farms’ launch of its Zero Carbon beef in the United States during the Prime Minister’s visit.

BUT THE MOVES accompany historically high meat prices across the world, and do not offer an easy proposition for marketers despite the best intentions to translate sustainability and emissions commitments into action.

A report by Rabobank agribusiness specialist Genevieve Steven has identified that consumers’ willingness and ability to pay the premium that accompanies such products is likely to be tested over 2022, with global food prices rising.

Regardless of the outlook, it was beholden on meat companies to invest in production system changes to meet climate targets.

Some first movers in the carbon-neutral beef space are utilising offsets to generate their carbon-neutral status. These offsets themselves add costs in the supply chain.

“Reducing emissions, while saving the cost of offsets, has its own costs, and for businesses to implement carbon-reduction practices, a return on investment or revenue to cover these costs will be needed,” Steven said.

Silver Fern Farms used the PM’s visit to the United States in early June to launch its Net Zero Carbon Angus beef product, now being sold in New York, the Mid-West and California.

A two-year pilot programme working with New Zealand farmers had informed the project, as farmers gained an understanding of their carbon footprint.

On-farm carbon sequestration included native and

riparian planting, with the product fully certified as net Carbon Zero by Toitū Envirocare, with USDA approval.

Silver Fern CEO Simon Limmer said certification was achieved not by purchasing carbon offsets, but by genuine on-farm balancing out of emissions. ■



Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern at the Net Carbon Zero launch in New York. Photo: Silver Fern Farms.

CWD: continued

DINZ science and policy manager, Emil Murphy, says that while the literature review contains no real surprises, it does bring together what’s known about the risks from CWD in a very useful summary to help shape ongoing policy.

“There are still gaps in knowledge about this disease and how it spreads,” he says. “That uncertainty, plus what we do know, means that CWD remains the number one biosecurity threat for the New Zealand deer industry.

“We will continue to work closely with international researchers and biosecurity authorities to ensure the most rigorous possible standards are in place to keep this disease out of New Zealand permanently. We’ve seen it pop up in Scandinavia and Asia. We don’t want it here.”

He adds that with the opening up of borders and likely return to New Zealand of hunters from countries with CWD, total vigilance will be needed to ensure they do not bring the disease with them.

“DINZ will use the report to help formulate a longer-term joint programme with Biosecurity NZ to make sure we are ready, and stay ready, to deal with CWD if it should show up here.”

- Farmers are a key part of New Zealand’s exotic disease surveillance system, which is critical to our biosecurity defences and also supports our access to overseas markets. (See also *Deer Industry News*, February 2021, page 16: **Something unusual? Call the vet!**)
- If you spot anything suspicious, especially neurological signs in deer, call your vet without delay, or report it to the MPI exotic pest and disease hotline on 0800 80 99 66. ■

Branch chair profile: Sean de Lacy

Sean de Lacy is chair of the Taihape/Ruapehu branch of NZDFA. The grouping combines the former Tongariro branch with the Taihape DFA, a sensible move given the gradual fall in numbers in recent years and the similar geography of both regions. Sean told *Deer Industry News* a bit about himself and how he came to join the branch.

I GREW UP in the King Country in Owhango, just south of Taumarunui. As a kid I was involved in live capture of deer, which really ignited my passion for farming them.

As a young fella I bought 20 acres of dirt next to my old man's property. We deer fenced it and that was the beginning!

I spent a lot of time overseas shearing and started a couple of my own runs in Europe. That eventually took me to 150-odd countries and experiencing how the other half lives.

Nothing beats home though. I packed away the wanderlust and am back in Owhango focusing on my two small girls and my blocks. Deer farming worked well for me while I was travelling, as it requires low labour inputs and, in my case, animal health issues were few and far between.

After I hung up my backpack I bought another deer unit. It's hill country and I started breeding up a few more hinds. I also lease an easy but small deer fattening unit closer to home and another small unit in Taumarunui that's also deer fenced. I have also ended up with a few hundred hectares at Raurimu which is all deer fenced and I'm in the process of cleaning this unit up.

There's a fair bit of travelling to do between all my blocks, sometimes with small (but noisy) passengers who are equally as invested in the passion as I am. My elder daughter (now almost 3) could 'roar' before she could say Mum or Dad.



Taihape/Ruapehu NZDFA branch chair Sean de Lacy shares a cheeky selfie with daughter Ruby.

After close to 12 years working in multiple abattoirs in both New Zealand and Norway, it was good to have another insight into a major part of the process, from farm to fork.

I was keen to get more involved in the industry and investigated exporting meat into Macau/China. I was lucky enough to have a cousin who had lived there for many years and was in the hospitality



Sean can enjoy spectacular views from one of his central North Island deer blocks, Mahimoore.

industry. He had multiple restaurant sites and contacts which led to more understanding of the final link in the chain.

As well as farming deer I'm also an independent agent for both fat and store stock, and procure for multiple live export companies.

After multiple attempts to simply join a group of like-minded deer farmers and not knowing about Advance Parties (APs), I found out that our NZDFA branch had disbanded. Joining an AP was not that simple and, in fact, I didn't even know what the NZDFA was!

I was not the only one farming deer in the area and felt there was still a need for such an organisation. I was lucky enough to join the Taihape NZDFA branch, a very strong and determined group of farmers. They don't muck around and they get straight to the point. With their help we have now amalgamated into the Taihape/Ruapehu NZDFA. We are well supported by neighbouring branches. This has also opened up opportunities with regard to our annual weaner deer sale, the only one in the North Island, and our own velvet supply group.

I find myself now in the position of chair and through these trying times I am keen to hook into the multiple and major issues facing deer farmers and farmers in general that are emerging.

Please make the most of your DFA branch as our voices are definitely heard by the powers that be – whether they like it or not! Encourage other farmers to join as, in my case at least, the rewards are substantial and you will be heard. The days of helicopter clubs are over and all of us farmers now fit much better into our organisation: the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association. ■

Branch chairs' meeting and DINZ road trip

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor and Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

It's been a topsy-turvy couple of years. There was a brief return to normality in 2021 with a traditional conference, DFA AGM and technical workshop in Invercargill. This year the deer industry has been forced to adapt and change, to keep connected with farmers and partners.

IN LIEU OF the planned Wellington-based conference for 2022, the event was split out into a one-day branch chairs' meeting followed by the NZDFA AGM (see page 29) at the Brentwood Hotel in Kilbirnie, Wellington on 24–25 May. This was followed by a series of six half-day regional DINZ road trip events through the first half of June. The programme slotted together well, showing the benefits of the good cooperation between DINZ and NZDFA.



Delegates and guests at the branch chairs' meeting, held in May.

The social side wasn't forgotten, with a memorable branch chairs' dinner held in Wellington to honour the decades-long contributions of several well-known members of the deer farming community (see page 31). Visitors to the road trip didn't miss out, enjoying a range of delicious New York-themed venison snacks such as venison pastrami and Reuben sandwiches prepared by DINZ executive chef Graham Brown.

Branch roundup discussion

A few themes emerged during a roundup from branch chairs:

- Impending regulations (especially **He Waka Eke Noa**, HWEN) remain a concern, especially unintended consequences such as destocking and loss of good land to trees (see below).
- **Covid** has curtailed branch activities, especially velvet competitions.
- Conditions around the country have been **patchy**, with traditionally dry places awash with feed and summer safe regions struggling with drought.
- **Velvet** prices are good; **venison** is getting there but needs to improve some more if venison is to be competitive.
- There are still people **leaving the industry**.
- **Communication** with farmers has declined during Covid and DINZ needs to get back out and connect.

- There are a lot of deer farmers out there who are **off the radar** and not engaged with the rest of the industry.

He Waka Eke Noa (HWEN) update

DINZ chief executive **Innes Moffat** reminded branch chairs that whatever views people held, the process for pricing agricultural emissions was happening. "A change of government wouldn't stop it. Groundswell won't stop it. Like it or not, agricultural emissions will be priced from 2025. Our challenge is to find a usable system that is better than the ETS."

Moffat said the industry didn't agree with the methane reduction targets (10 percent by 2030 and 27–45 percent by 2050). He was in "violent agreement" with methane campaigner Martin Rupert about the need to differentiate greenhouse gases, but noted that the government had set the targets, not HWEN.

"The challenge is to keep farming out of the ETS. Without a pricing mechanism that suits agriculture [this was due to be announced within a few days – updates on p23 and 24] we will be going [into the ETS]."

The ETS was blind to efficiencies achieved at farm level and a unified approach from the agricultural sector was needed to keep agriculture out of it.

Moffat said pricing based on a per-hectare cost favoured extensive systems like deer and penalised intensive agriculture, so wasn't favoured by dairying. At the other extreme, a cap and trade system based on a set amount of gas allocated where people bid, would favour intensive systems that could afford to pay more for the gases produced. "That's absolutely not in our interests."

He said the compromise was likely to be somewhere in the middle with a farm-level system taxed on the total amount of gas emitted. The calculations for how much methane was emitted per kg of venison and velvet needed to be factored in, he said. A working group led by MPI was on the job with this, he said.

Sequestration on farm that was outside the ETS also needed to be accounted for. It would take more than a tax to encourage



DINZ CEO Innes Moffat: Unified approach needed to keep agriculture out of the ETS.

farmers to cut emissions, Moffat said. “It would be paid by those who could afford it while others were forced out of business. There need to be incentives to pick up greenhouse gas reduction technologies as they become available. There needs to be some relief from a potentially damaging cost to a business. That’s a bottom line for us.”

He said that while it’s appropriate that a lot of the focus should go on the main source of agricultural emissions – dairying – the country needed a diverse primary sector and solutions to emissions that suited everyone.

Kelly Forster, programme director for the He Waka Eke Noa partnership, joined the meeting remotely, explaining the key milestones.



HWEN programme director Kelly Forster joined the meeting remotely.

The first group are around farm planning. The aim to have 25 percent of farms with greenhouse gas emissions in their farm plan by December 2021 was derailed by Covid, but 21 percent had achieved this by January 2022, and 25 percent should make it by September. Getting to 100 percent of farms by 2025 is a work in progress. Forster noted a voluntary target is an ambitious target, but all HWEN partners were well committed.

There was good progress against the target of 25 percent of farms knowing their greenhouse gas number by December 2021, with 61 percent reaching that target by then. Getting to the December 2022 target of 100 percent knowing their GHG number would be a stretch, but Forster was optimistic.

The next big tasks were to get farm-level accounting and reporting for GHGs piloted and then in place by December 2025.

The final piece of the jigsaw was the pricing mechanism.

Forster said the two pricing options (processor level and farm level) both recognised sequestration including managed native vegetation regardless of age. Riparian plantings and exotics in shelter belts or small woodlots that didn’t qualify under the ETS were also recognised. She said the clear preference from farmers was a farm-level pricing system, but there were concerns about equity and availability of mitigation options across farm systems. Farmers were also keen that soil carbon and pre-2008 native forests were recognised.

Forster acknowledged that it is the landowner who has “ownership” of the sequestration and that there would need to be agreement between them and the business owner (in a leasing

situation) as to how this is managed through a lease agreement, including transitional arrangements.

She said pre-1990 native forests are probably no longer sequestering carbon, and New Zealand could not credibly claim that they were. In principle there needed to be “additionality” to claim the ongoing sequestration by native plantings, and that required livestock to be excluded. She noted that not all new native plantings needed to be fenced to exclude stock where there were natural barriers.

Forster didn’t accept Martin Rupert’s claim that methane was not contributing to increased warming because emissions were level or declining. “It’s a potent greenhouse gas.”

She said the bottom line was that New Zealand had to be able meet its initial methane reduction targets by 2030 for our system to have any credibility internationally and whatever your views on the warming effects of methane it had to be part of our greenhouse gas accounting system.

Steve Borland (Waikato) questioned the reach of HWEN’s GHG pricing mechanisms. Would it include lifestyle blocks?

Forster said there needed to be a tradeoff between fairness and practicality, and the system will capture anything with the equivalent of more than 550 stock units or 50 dairy cows, or for growers, anyone applying more than 40 tonnes of nitrogen. “That includes about 23,000 farms and accounts for 96 percent of agricultural emissions. The remaining 4 percent is accounted for by another 23,000 small lifestyle blocks.”

Mandy Bell (Wanaka, DINZ Board) queried whether extensive farming interests would be properly represented in any future governance board. Forster said the oversight body would carry forward the HWEN partnership model and that would include recognition of the role of extensive farming systems.

Update 1: Pricing mechanism

Pricing mechanism recommendations by HWEN were made public on 8 June. The key features of the recommended farm-level split-gas levy are:

- Farms calculate their short- and long-lived gas emissions through a single centralised calculator (or through existing tools and software that are linked to the centralised calculator).
- Calculated on-farm emissions determine the cost rather than the use of national averages.
- Recognition of reduced emissions from on-farm efficiencies and mitigations as they become available.
- Incentives are provided for uptake of actions (practices and technologies) to reduce emissions.
- A split-gas approach applies different levy rates to short- and long-lived gas emissions.
- On-farm sequestration is recognised, which could offset the cost of the levy.
- Levy revenue is invested in research, development, and extension (providing technical advice and information) including a dedicated fund for Māori landowners.
- A System Oversight Board with expertise and representation from the primary sector will work closely with an Independent Māori Board to provide recommendations on levy rates and prices, and set the strategy for use of levy revenue.

These options will go out for public consultation, but the deadline for enabling legislation is the end of this year.

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Branch chairs: continued

Update 2: DINZ response to HWEN report

On the release of the HWEN report, chair Ian Walker said DINZ supports the decision of the partners to submit their recommendations to the Government, but continues to have concerns about the potential for greenhouse gas (GHG) pricing to have a severe financial impact on some deer farms.

He said the report emphasises that emission levies should be set at a level that is sufficient to drive emissions reductions and increase sequestration, while being as low as possible so the primary sector remains profitable.

“The report says several factors need to be balanced when the government sets GHG levy rates. These include the need to reduce emissions; whether cost-effective mitigations are available; the social, cultural and economic impact of levies; and the risk that a high levy could result in production shifting offshore, leading to higher global emissions,” Walker said.

“Levies must not be used as the sole means of driving a reduction in on-farm emissions and adaptation to climate change, especially when there are no cost-effective mitigation technologies available for our farmers to adopt. A holistic, whole-farm approach is needed that will encourage and incentivise farmers to adopt new technologies when these become available.”

Walker said DINZ, by being part of HWEN, was able to successfully advocate for changes to earlier drafts of the recommendations report.

“The most significant of these is a provision for levy relief for those farms that, because of national and local body regulations, are unable to plant trees for carbon sequestration and have no access to effective mitigation technologies. This will be welcomed by deer farmers in districts where you cannot plant exotic trees because of the need to preserve outstanding natural landscapes and prevent the spread of wildings,” he says.

“Unfortunately, there is no levy relief recommended for hill and high country farmers where tree planting is ruled out by climate or soil type alone.”

DINZ would continue to advocate for relief for farmers who don't have sequestration options, but who are otherwise managing their on-farm environment responsibly, Walker said.

“It is a major anomaly that low-intensity hill and high country deer, beef and sheep farms with low fertiliser or feed inputs, but with great water quality and native biodiversity and vegetation, will be likely most affected by a carbon charge.”

As a partner in HWEN, DINZ has been able to initiate a review of the formula for calculating deer emissions, which unduly penalise deer. It is also seeking to get emissions charges for deer balanced fairly between venison and velvet. At the moment the burden falls solely on venison.

“Farmers should help fund development of agricultural GHG mitigation technologies and their adoption, but this must not imperil the viability of deer farming as a food producing industry. Our farmers want to remain profitable as deer farmers – they have no wish to become carbon foresters or traders. Nor is it in New Zealand's interests for this to happen.”

Update 3: Climate Commission comments

As we went to press the Climate Change Commission (CCC) made its comments on the HWEN recommendations. Of note were CCC

recommendations that:

- vegetation on farms qualifying for sequestration credit under the ETS be included under that scheme, with other non-qualifying vegetation covered by a separate system
- synthetic nitrogen be incorporated into the ETS and not included in HWEN's farm-level pricing model.

HWEN programme director Kelly Forster welcomed the CCC's overall acceptance of its recommendations, but pushed back somewhat against the above points. She said these changes could undermine the whole-farm-system approach, and it was better for farmers to have more direct control over actions and inputs that would affect their emissions levels.

Branch chair and roadshow presentations

The following presentations were initially made at the branch chairs' meeting in Wellington before being taken around the country as part of the six-location DINZ road trip.

New and improved VelTrak tags coming

New and improved VelTrak tags are being issued for the coming season and further improvements are on their way, DINZ quality assurance manager Rob Gregory was telling DFA branch chairs and DINZ road trip participants.

The first season's use of the new tagging and tracing system for deer velvet went well, he reported. Over 340,000 tags passed successfully along the velvet chain from DINZ to vets, to farmers,



New velvet tags for the 2022-2023 season (top) incorporate more white space and a new, more adhesive, glue, compared with the old tag (below).

to processors and finally into the market in the 2021-2022 season.

Farmers will get the improved VelTrak tag from their supervising vet practices from late-August onwards.

The right-hand white section of the tag is now clear of any printing or laminate and has been extended to 8.5 centimetres. A new, stronger glue had been selected, improving adhesion two-fold, that should, “perform better in the field than the existing one”.

Current tags are still valid. If there are any problems with the



Rob Gregory, DINZ quality manager (standing) talks VelTrak at a DINZ roadshow event in Palmerston North.

new ones, DINZ is working on a further back-up plan.

The language for the Velvet Status Declaration (VSD) has also been changed to make it easier to understand, while still being a legal statement of compliance, Gregory said.

He is working with MPI to hopefully further simplify the VSD process for 2023–2024. From his point of view, “the tag is the declaration. It will be a major step forward if we can get this through.”

Velvet industry farmgate value keeps rising

The farmgate value of the New Zealand velvet industry will surpass \$120 million this season, up from around \$30m in 2009. Over the next decade this figure could rise to over \$200m if the industry’s aspirations are met, DINZ manager markets Rhys Griffiths told NZDFA branch chairs in May.

More opportunities emerging in South Korea and the potential of China for velvet health food products mean the industry has a positive outlook over the medium term. However, there are also some risks to be aware of, including Covid-19 disruption, inflation

and reduced consumer confidence. “If industry is successful in its ambitions, we could increase that to at least \$200 million in the next 10 or so years,” Griffiths said.

“Companies are investing in ‘NZ-ness’ as they see real value in our ingredient,” in South Korea’s healthy foods market. There are NZ Trade & Enterprise workshops helping velvet connect better with Korean consumers, too, and more innovative products in the pipeline, like the newly launched Sooshin Energy Shot from New Origin.

China, where there is a market for natural and organic consumption, albeit unmanaged, also represents a significant opportunity for growth. In order to replicate what has been done in Korea, entry to the market must be well managed.

“Now is the time to own the position,” he said. Velvet exporters are working within the China Deer Velvet Coalition (CDVC) to establish links with potential customers in the Chinese food sector.

One of those CDVC companies, PGG Wrightson, is collaborating to promote the product into China as a food ingredient. It recently succeeded in exporting dry whole stick which, Griffiths said, “is a real first with a new product form into a new port”.

The first-ever shipment of dried velvet arrived in China in early June, Wrightson’s national deer and velvet manager Tony Cochrane reported at the Palmerston North pitstop for the DINZ road trip.

“If we want to expand and grow a market, because we want to grow production, we’ve got to find ways of getting into China and that’s why we’re trying to tap into those food companies,” Cochrane said.

DINZ investigations are also underway for market prospects in Taiwan, Japan and Vietnam.



The Sooshin Energy Shot – another innovative velvet-based product.



DINZ manager markets, Rhys Griffiths, updated the meetings on prospects for the velvet sector.



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Branch chairs: continued

Venison still in recovery mode

Venison is “still in recovery mode” DINZ venison market manager Nick Taylor’s presentation to NZDFA branch chairs showed.

While price lifts have been occurring in Europe and the United States, “they’re still not quite back to where they were,” he said.

The market diversification programme continues to push away from restaurants in Europe towards retail markets in the United States and China and is making headway.

“Companies are looking to build those markets with a long-term view,” he reported.

Covid-19 headaches continue for exporters and have been compounded by the war in Ukraine, creating extra risk for getting chilled product to market, especially in Europe.

Despite this, venison exports to China lifted by 750 percent to around 340 tonnes in April, compared with April 2021. More high-value products have also been heading to the United States and Europe.

At around \$15.20/kg, the average price achieved in Europe in April was higher this year than it has been in either of the past two years, he noted. He saw that as a positive signal that value has been growing.

Foodservice is also starting to recover around the world, though populations’ appetite for eating out has differed. US diners had been reluctant to eat out though this is now recovering. In



Nick Taylor outlined the situation in New Zealand’s main markets.

Germany meanwhile – which had near identical levels of Covid-19 cases and vaccination – everybody has been out and about in recent months, as a video featuring DINZ consultant chef Shannon Campbell showed.

First Light’s general manager venison Matt Gibson stepped into Taylor’s shoes during the early part of the DINZ road trip when the former was in isolation. Gibson stressed the importance of holding firm and retaining value, once markets have diversified.

The key will be “not to jump back in and move that product out of the United States or China,” he said. “For us, it will be holding firm and being able to freeze product and put it into the United States – particularly product we can put a label claim like Certified Humane on, that we know has a premium market.”

Roadshow initiative welcomed

South Canterbury’s Mark Tapley says the roadshows were a great initiative and well supported by deer farmers in his region.



“It covered off the main topics really well – pretty much everything you’d get at a national conference. If anything the roadshows could be a bit longer to give more in-depth coverage and allow more time for Q and A, but it’s a great start.”

Tapley says there is still a place for a national conference but perhaps just a biennial one, with the roadshows every other year. Probably the greatest benefit of the regional roadshows this year was that it put farmers front and centre.

“It’s also helped reinforce farmer confidence in their business, as well as what the industry leadership is doing.”

Life after P2P

There’s no denying the success of the Passion2Profit Advance Parties (AP) and Deer Industry Environment Groups over the past few years. People have learned plenty and felt the benefits. But the majority of deer farmers haven’t been involved and many are farming barely aware of DINZ and DFA, let alone programmes like P2P.

DINZ farm performance manager Phil McKenzie and facilitator Michelle Rush workshopped ways a P2P successor programme – a “Deer Connector” service – could involve a much broader range of deer farmers. While it won’t



DINZ farm performance manager Phil McKenzie: wanting to grow the orange slice on the pie graph representing engaged deer farmers.



DINZ executive chef Graham Brown discusses the versatility of venison with roadshow attendees. One of the samplings he prepared (inset) was smoked venison on a cracker with chutney and cheese. Visitors also enjoyed venison sliders with red onion stout and chocolate marmalade, a venison Reuben sandwich and grilled Yakinuku meatballs.

aim to commit people to groups like APs, it could help them access some of the many programmes already available, which will help them deal with the myriad regulatory challenges hitting farms, as well as further helping in areas of productivity improvement.

The plan is for regionally based facilitators to personally contact deer farms. They'd be offered the chance to get on board with already-available programmes that could help with environmental, financial, productivity and other goals. McKenzie said that if just half of those contacted could be connected with such programmes, that would be major achievement. Even if they chose not to, knowing that DINZ and DFA were thinking about them at individual farm level still gave benefits and made people feel part of the industry.

Farmers in the discussion said there were complex reasons for people staying away. Some people felt unconfident being in the same groups as big operators, some weren't comfortable with indoor activities involving a lot of reading and some simply don't like groups. Nonetheless, there was a positive response to the concept of engaging with a wider group of deer farmers.



AgResearch scientist Jamie Ward discusses the co-innovation framework at the first roadshow event.

Science 4 Success gives increased research leverage

DINZ science and policy manager Emil Murphy and AgResearch deer scientist Jamie Ward talked through the new Science 4 Success (S4S) programme at the DFA branch chairs' meeting and during the DINZ road trip.

Now in its second year, S4S brings together venison and velvet research – previously handled separately under DEEResearch and VARNZ – into one co-innovation programme.

The new way the deer industry is conducting research with AgResearch has evolved over the past 50 years of deer research projects, offering “increased leverage in terms of research capability and in thinking space for our products and our food products,” Ward said.

He was the sole presenter for one of the group sessions at the DINZ road trip pitstop at Palmerston North, as Murphy, along with others, was isolating with Covid-19. Ward outlined for deer farmers the work, which is aiming to “support the ethical production of deer products for the world's consumers through science-based outputs translated into practical and effective systems or activities”.

At the heart of the current work is programme management,

capability development, Tomorrow's Deer, genetics through Deer Select and Te Aō Māori in deer science innovation. S4S then has four project streams: on-farm; improved breeding and genetics, environment and post-farmgate studies.

Future projects, dependent on the sector's needs could include: work on greenhouse gases specifically for deer, ensuring welfare is maintained after antler removal, antler quality and human health, new products and processes, any new on-farm health issues and breakthroughs that lead towards healthier deerscapes.

DINZ Board Q+A

Six DINZ Board members made themselves available to answer questions from the branch chairs. The questions, and a summary of the board members' answers, are as follows:

1. Where does He Waka Eke Noa leave us?

Other sectors are not interested in options that would give the deer sector more advantages. The focus of mitigation options is likely to be things related to feed consumption and methane, such as vaccines and additives. Intensive feed systems like dairy will benefit most.

2. How would a vaccine to reduce methane be received by consumers?

That's not clear, but deer do receive vaccines for other animal health reasons.

3. What do we know about actual methane emissions from deer?

There's not much deer-specific data but DINZ is helping HWEN review what there is and AgResearch is looking at forage effects on deer emissions.

DINZ pushed back about inequities in proposed systems, especially in areas where tree planting is not an option.

4. Where should the emphasis be for a successor programme to P2P?

Two areas being pursued are expanding reach from the former Advance Parties into the wider industry, and helping farmers with integrated farm planning, which breaks down the silos between environment, financial, human resources etc.

5. Proposed increase in OSPRI levy

The NAIT database has not been fit for purpose and needs rebuilding. All NAIT funders want a better business case for increasing the levy take. The proposed fee increase has been scaled back but it is still an increase (see also page 18).

6. Support for farmers coping with compliance demands

Half of board time is consumed by compliance issues. Events like winter grazing workshops, greenhouse gas roadshows and work through deer industry environment groups are all designed to support farmers on compliance.

7. Is the levy take between velvet and venison still fair?

It's currently 55:45 venison:velvet and there don't seem to be imbalances at the moment. The venison sector is the one that currently needs plenty of support.

8. Can we keep supplying the venison market and how will we keep venison producers positive?

Venison was going well until Covid hit. There are still challenges and while a system change, say to lamb, might look good on paper, it needs to be thought through. “Do you really want to be doing all that crutching and dagging?” one board member asked. “Think about the long term and why you enjoy being in deer.”

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Branch chairs: continued

Simply replacing venison in premium markets with product from cull velvetters can cause marketing issues and undo all your good groundwork.

9. Will inflation price venison out of the market?

Overall food price inflation will continue but it's unlikely venison will stand out from other foods. Any slight changes in price relativity will likely be overshadowed by the effects of manipulations in large markets like China.

10. Will animals kept in winter barns continue to be excluded from Cervena®?

We need to be careful not to erode our market positioning, although it might be possible to turn it around and sell the welfare and environment benefits of housing. Ironically, deer fed on winter crops in the paddock are seen as "grass fed", while housed animals are not.

11. More career options for young people wanting to join the industry?

There is tertiary training available through the Primary ITO deer husbandry course. Also programmes like Next Generation, Big Deer Tour and Future Farmers help get young people interested in the industry. Even taking on a youngster for a couple of months could be enough to give them a leg up into deer farming.

12. How can we arrest the decline in deer numbers?

Profitability needs to stack up against sheep and beef, but farm succession is also an issue. The hind breeding herd is down to about 370,000 and DINZ is budgeting for a reduced kill. Only two or three years ago hind numbers were growing. "It can take only one year of bad prices for people to downsize their hind herd, but it takes three years of good prices to get them building numbers again," one commented. Venison needs to be fetching \$10-\$11/kg to be competitive with lamb at present.

We forget how severe the impact of Covid has been: it was "like Hiroshima" for the deer industry. Companies are innovating and prices are recovering – we need to remind farmers of this.

The hind cull has not been all bad news. One board member commented that some of the older hinds being culled recently were "old enough to vote".

Farewell and thanks

NZDFA chair John Somerville thanked outgoing DINZ board chair **Ian Walker** for his exemplary service and leadership. Ian's six years on the board, five of those as chair, wound up at the end of last month. He commented that the connection between DINZ and the productive sector had been "incredibly important".

Also stepping down from the DINZ board at the end of last month was **Mark Harris**, who has served as a producer representative since July 2017.



Outgoing DINZ chair, Ian Walker.

DFA issues**The Stars are Risen – again**

Each time the last rites are being read for the Rising Stars velvet and hard antler competition, the event is resurrected. Following a three-year hiatus thanks mainly to Covid but also to lack of support, the Waipa branch of NZDFA has breathed life back into Rising Stars, offering to host the event next year.

Because of timing issues getting two-year-old velvet and hard antler ready in time, it's never been viable to include Rising Stars in the velvet nationals, which are held in early-mid December.

Next Generation Programme

The 2022 programme is being hosted by the Taihape-Ruapehu DFA based in Ohakune on 11-12 August. This will be the 10th year of the programme.

The future of deer industry conferences

Support for the annual conference is declining, with fewer grass roots farmers in attendance each year and some choosing to attend via the live streaming instead. It can be hard to get decent numbers along, even to high-quality technical workshops, which are free of charge to attendees.



Are the days of deer industry conferences like this numbered?

One suggestion was a biennial conference rather than annual, but there was still support for an annual event, especially the awards dinner – a special part of the year. Good quality speakers were seen as a must-have for a successful conference.

Innes Moffat noted that the DINZ road trip run in June at six locations around the motu had attracted about 300 registrations – more than would normally be seen at an annual conference.

Voting challenges

The postal voting required in the DFA constitution is no longer attracting good support, with a paltry 8 percent of eligible voters bothering to send in a ballot for the recent Selection and Appointments Panel election. A change to allow online voting will be put forward at a Special General Meeting coinciding with the October 2022 branch chairs' meeting.

Ian Spiers Memorial Trust: Don Gregson acknowledged

Tony Pearse, one of three trustees, acknowledged the years of valuable service by Don Gregson, for his skilled administration of the Ian Spiers Memorial Trust. Starting out with assets of \$48,000, this fund has grown to over \$300,000. The Trust supports leadership initiatives such as Ben Anderson's recent Nuffield programme. ■

47th Annual General Meeting

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The NZDFA's 47th AGM was held on 25 May, the morning after the branch chairs' meeting and dinner, being wrapped up in a tidy 1 hour 15 minutes. Highlights of the meeting follow.

NZDFA chair's 2022 report

Executive committee chair John Somerville delivered his final report. He is stepping down after 10 years on the committee including 4 years as chair.

The full report is available online at <https://deernz.org/nzdfa/about/agms-and-branch-chairs-meetings/> but highlights included:

- There has been a season of unusual climate extremes.
- Venison market is improving but the schedule still isn't where it's needed to be.
- The Executive Committee had successful meetings with the venison marketing companies to discuss concerns.
- Velvet has been performing well, with good progress made in new markets.
- The introduction of VelTrak was largely successful except for some issues with adhesives on tags failing.
- DFA membership is down slightly but still includes about 70 percent of deer farmers, which is very good for a voluntary membership organisation.
- There was another very successful Next Generation programme, this time based in Queenstown.
- The successor programme to P2P won't include Advance Parties. Any continuation of these will need to be funded through DINZ.
- The DFA now has a potential role taking up the reins of on-farm productivity and environmental initiatives started by P2P. The new focus will be extending the reach to more deer farmers – a "Connector" initiative – and a focus on integrated farm planning. The DFA's challenge is to help ensure these are relevant for farmers.
- It has been important having Ian Walker and Karen Middelberg representing the deer industry as part of He Waka Eke Noa partnership. The pressure applied has helped shift the dial a little in favour of extensive systems like deer.

Secunder's reply

David Stevens, who has filled the seconder's role since 2017, made the following observations (summarised here):

This time last year we were remarking on the challenges of Covid with the hope things would improve in 2021/22. And then along came Delta, quickly followed by Omicron.

Venison: It has been great to see the Executive taking the initiative and conveying the concerns of deer farmers about unsustainably low returns and the long-term effects these could have on the industry.

The venison companies need to be commended for the initiatives they have taken in these extraordinary times. This has been a timely reminder of the importance of good communication.



The 2021/22 NZDFA Executive Committee team, from left: Justin Stevens, Karen Middelberg, Mark McCoard and John Somerville (chair). John stepped down at the AGM and is replaced on the committee by Jamie Ward (inset). Justin Stevens takes over as chair for 2022/23.

We don't want a rerun of what happened in 2002, when there was a steep and sustained drop in venison prices. It takes very little to tip the balance of supply in the wrong direction.

Velvet: Well done to the Executive, NVSB and DFA branches for promoting velvet industry compliance. Although there were a few teething problems this season, VelTrak has made the transaction from farm to buyer/processor so much smoother. It is also an ideal time to remind farmers of their responsibilities when velvetting, as the Deer Code of Welfare is currently before NAWAC.

Decisions to cancel velvet competitions were correct and a testament to the responsible attitude this industry takes to risk.

NZDFA Membership and branch strength: The NZDFA is more relevant than ever when it comes to representing farmers. We are a small industry with unique needs and a strong voice is absolutely necessary. We've got issues around water quality and winter grazing, He Waka Eke Noa, and NAIT levies to name a few.

We are often seen as unimportant, but for perspective, our velvet export earnings alone are more than double that of the cherry industry. Perhaps it's time for us to lift our profile.

It was pleasing to see the DFA Executive taking a stand [on He Waka Eke Noa] against what would be an unacceptable situation for extensive farmers.

Environmental Issues: Thanks to the DFA, Lindsay Fung, Sara Elmes and yourself, the deer industry has gained respect within regional councils. One example was the extremely positive feedback from MPI and regional council staff who attended the recent wintering field days in Otago and Southland.

Advance Parties: These have provided an important opportunity for deer farmers to benchmark their performance and

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AGM: continued

share ideas with others. It's not only an opportunity to share ideas but also to understand you don't face the farming challenges alone.

NAIT: The DFA has challenges ahead with NAIT. There are proposed levy increases, tagging requirements and accountability. So far, NAIT and service providers have not been held accountable for how well they meet their obligations. This needs to change.

NZDFA and DINZ: The relationship between the DFA and the DINZ Board is a strength of the deer industry and a testament to everyone: Ian Walker and his board, John Somerville and the Executive Committee, and all staff.

Thank you John for your time on the Executive and the past 4 years as NZDFA chair. It is a thankless job and one you can't do without support, so thanks to Mel also.

To the DFA Executive: I know you will do your very best for the deer farmers you represent. All the best for the 2022/23 year.

Financial highlights

- The NZDFA recorded an operating surplus of \$2,979 for the year to 31 March 2022.
- Subscription income was slightly down on budget.
- Travel and accommodation expenses were down thanks to more meeting via Zoom and less travel to meetings.
- The 2022/23 budget is aimed to break even, partly thanks to an increase in the membership subscription (up by "less than the rate of inflation").
- The budget includes an allowance for election costs this year
- The NZDFA's total equity has increased by \$2,979 to \$184,508

DINZ Board candidates

There were two candidates for the two producer positions available on the DINZ board (see page 8 for brief profiles). Each made presentations to the meeting and their comments included the following:

Jacqueline Rowarth: Good communication between farmers, science, Wellington and society in general is essential. Much of my activity has been talking to farmers around the country, especially on soil carbon, greenhouse gases, water quality, He Waka Eke Noa and the supposed link between nitrates and colorectal cancer (there isn't one), the push for organics and so on.

Processing companies should be challenged about responding to consumer preferences [on environment] which are generally: "it sounds good as long as we don't have to pay for it".

We need to present a value proposition that we produce essential nutrition for the least environmental impact and the food we produce is delicious.

Hamish Fraser: I want there to be a robust and profitable deer industry for my generation. There are short-term price challenges but also long-term prospects to consider. I'm also interested in leadership development in the industry. I'm conscious that levy-funded organisations have been getting more involved in advocacy. That's important but must be balanced with their other roles.

Overall I've got good hands-on industry experience, plus governance and risk management with a strong financial background. I'm passionate about the future of the industry and want to contribute.

Update: At its meeting on 15 June the Selection and Appointments Panel interviewed the two candidates and confirmed the appointment of both for the two vacancies on the DINZ board.

Constitutional matters

Selection and Appointments Panel: **Graham Peck** and **William Oliver** were elected to fill the **two-year term** positions and **Leith Chick** was elected to fill the **one-year term**.

Executive Committee: **Jamie Ward** (AgResearch Invermay) has been appointed to join the NZDFA Executive Committee, filling the vacancy left by John Somerville. **Karen Middelberg** has been appointed Treasurer and **Justin Stevens** is the new NZDFA Executive Committee chair.

NZDFA Life membership – Paddy and Barbara Boyd: The Boyds were unable to attend the meeting so the official confirmation of this honour will happen at the October branch chairs' meeting. ■

Elk & Wapiti Society

These are some of the projects we have been working through over the past 12 months.

IN CONJUNCTION WITH the Kenton Family of Leander Downs, Timaru, some genetic opportunities have come forward.

- Over 600 straws of North American Elk semen have been donated to AgResearch Invermay for use in research.
- An additional 600 straws of North American Elk semen have been made available **free** for "Next Generation" deer farmers.
- The establishment of an Elk/Wapiti genetic preservation storage facility.

North American Elk genetics need protecting for future generations. With this in mind, Xcell Breeding Services has agreed to establish a storage facility for the preservation of North American Elk semen, embryos, etc.

We have also created guidelines as to what semen is to be preserved and how those genetics would best be used in the future.

If you would like to get involved with any of these initiatives, please email elkwapitinz@gmail.com

Over the past few years, we have been involved with DINZ through the P2P programme to establish:

- A "Hybrid Growth Curve" venison wall chart for the industry. This combines 5 years of data and shows potential growth of hybrid deer. (The young stock in this information have been farmed in a genuine commercial setting.)
- The collection and dissemination of information to create a Terminal Sire fact sheet for your *Deer Facts Manual* (enclosed with this issue of *Deer Industry News*). This overview of numerous topics will provide you with tools to take advantage of timed venison and larger carcass genetics.

As information for the fact sheet was being collected, the need for additional information around farming Elk/Wapiti was highlighted. I will be asking the Elk & Wapiti Society committee to help create a general fact sheet on farming Elk/Wapiti, which will be made available and printable from the society's website, www.elkwapitisociety.co.nz ■

– Grant Hasse, President, Elk Wapiti Society of New Zealand

Contributions recognised at special dinner

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

About 50 DFA members, DINZ staff and guests met after the branch chairs' meeting for a special dinner to recognise the long-term contributions of several industry leaders.

From the North...

Richard Broughton was acknowledged for service over more than two decades as chair of the Northland DFA. He brought “quiet, determined authority to the role”, leading the branch through a challenging time dealing with strict regulations in the region designed to protect sensitive ecosystems against escape of deer.

Richard said he was “blown away” and insisted he hadn't done anything special. He had some excellent times in the industry and it had also given him a lot of respect for what others had done.



Richard Broughton – “blown away” by recognition.

... South

Southlander **John Somerville** was recognised for his long-standing service on the NZDFA Executive Committee, including four years as chair. Innes Moffat said John had “steadfastly represented” the interests of all deer farmers.

A side of Covid

There was more than good cheer circulating at the branch chairs' dinner. Unfortunately it was also something of a super-spreader event, with more than 20 people that are known of catching Covid on the night. We hope all those who caught the virus have had a speedy recovery with no lingering effects. Although masking is not practicable at social events like these, it's a reminder that Covid is still circulating widely and that where possible, masks should be worn at indoor events. It is not an imposition and it does help prevent spread.



Outgoing DFA chair John Somerville (centre) with new chair Justin Stevens (left) and Tony Pearse (right).

DEER FACTS

Terminal sires: a pathway to profit?

The use of terminal sires is a proven way to maximise profits from venison production. But it's not a silver bullet. It's a whole farm system that relies on good selection and management of hinds as well as stags/bulls.

The proof of the system can be seen in the photo below. These mixed sex weaners at the Lowes' Lynnford Farm, Canterbury, averaged 92 kg on 1 May. They'll likely kill out at more than 65 kg carcass weight in spring. (Photo taken 13 June).



Read the new *Deer Fact* 'Terminal sires for profitable venison production' enclosed in this issue of *Deer Industry News*. Then file it in the Management for profit section of your *Deer Fact* ring binder.



Deer Facts are produced by DINZ as part of the P2P strategy – a joint venture between DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries.

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Special dinner: continued

John had put energy into promoting new faces into leadership roles and connecting with marketing companies. Most recently he advocated tirelessly on behalf of deer, sheep and beef farmers grappling with the introduction of emissions pricing.

Tony Pearse noted John's enthusiasm for an advanced environmental management programme and his hard work strengthening connections across the industry.

John said he was humbled by the recognition. Ultimately it was about trying to make a difference. "It's been a privilege to be part of such a great team."

...and over the whole of New Zealand

One who has cast the longest shadow of all, not only over the New Zealand deer industry but also deer interests internationally, is **Tony Pearse**.

Tony retired from the DINZ producer manager role late last year, but it was not until this gathering that his countless friends and colleagues could pay a fitting, heartfelt, in-person tribute. Tony's immense contribution was detailed in the December 2021 *Deer Industry News*, but that process has never felt complete until friends could share their reminiscences at a gathering like this one.

Laughs and stories flowed as people from Tony's past and present shared their experiences. Here's a small sampling.

John Somerville (DFA chair): "When the new structure was put in place in 2002, the new position of producer manager was virtually written for Tony with his skill set. He became the glue that bound the DFA together. We always marvelled at Tony's huge knowledge of the industry's personalities, history and workings. He has a knack of making even complicated issues sound simple."

Innes Moffat (DINZ CEO): "Tony has an encyclopaedic knowledge of deer biology and farming systems, a photographic memory of industry events and people, abundant generosity and

side-splitting stories of events that may or may not have happened in years gone by."

Jamie Ward (AgResearch, DFA Executive Committee): "A lot of what we've been able to do has been a result of what Tony did in his career as a researcher before he joined DINZ. The relationship between the science community and industry wouldn't have been the same without him."

Mark O'Connor (former DINZ CEO): "You were working in DINZ but you always had the interests of the DFA at heart. You've been a wonderful man and grew into a great friend. Julie: thank you for sharing so much of Tony's time with us."

John Tacon (former DINZ quality manager): "The first time I met Tony was in the mid '80s when I was picking up some deer from his place on the Taeri Plains. He persuaded me to let him have a go driving my brand new Scania truck and he did it perfectly, even though his feet hardly reached the pedals. Neither of us knew we'd be working together as such good friends and colleagues so many years later. I'll treasure that friendship forever."

Speaking in response Tony read the engraving with the beautiful stone patu he'd been presented as a farewell gift by DINZ and NZDFA: *Thank you for your leadership, passion and knowledge: your friends and fans in the New Zealand deer industry.*

"It's been a wonderful experience, based on an astonishing animal, industry and people. In my wildest imagination I could never have dreamt of the experiences, camaraderie, connections with the people who farm these amazing animals, the connections through the DFA, the nurturing of new farmers – all of these things are the heart of our industry."

Tony acknowledged the incredible support of wife Julie and their son Richard, and their extended family. He also acknowledged former Invermay director Jock Allison for the start he was given.

"The animals we farm are incredible, but it's the people who have really made it special for me." ■



From left: Innes Moffat and John Somerville with Julie, Tony and Richard Pearse.