

Deer Industry News

Next Generation: Striding to the future

Tech Workshop
VENISON AND VELVET
MARKET UPDATES;
WINTER FEEDING;
GENETICS PROGRESS

Game season
BERLIN EMBASSY HOSTS
NZ VENISON SHOW;
FINE FOOD DAYS;
STRONG CHILLED DEMAND

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THE CASE FOR THE DEER
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Deer Industry News

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

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Contents

Editorial	3
Passion2Profit	
Well done, P2P: What's next?	4
P2P is for positives	6
Technical workshop draws strong interest	8
DINZ News	
NVSB and velveting reminders	14
He Waka Eke Noa: What we're doing	15
Markets	
Targeting high value in Scandinavia	16
Game season off with a bang	17
On Farm	
Barnstorming: Northerners look at indoor wintering	20
Making money from venison the easy way	21
NZDFA News	
Full platters on the plateau for Next Generation	22
Branch chair profile: Jason Rentoul	24
People	
Bob Swann honoured on his 90th	28
Future for local cartage business secured	29
Obituary: Philip Irwin	30
Recipe	
Sticky Asian glazed venison meatballs	31

Cover: It was another successful Next Generation programme in August, this time hosted by the Ruapehu/Taihape NZDFA. Here some of the 56 young deer farmers head back down to vehicles after a look around Ruapehu Red Deer Stud. See p22. Photo: Phil Stewart.

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Deer research: How we started



What were the chances of a government department in 1972 investing in research to farm a noxious animal? That was the situation with deer as efforts continued to exterminate them. There was little support for Nelson Cullen (then Director of Invermay) with his submission to MAF's senior executives to establish a deer research project at Invermay.



Ken Drew meets an early challenge.

THE PROGRAMME DID get underway in 1972/3 with some discouragement from the Dunedin office of MAF. In the early 1970s, farmgate returns for lamb and beef were about 70c/kg of carcass, but wild shot venison paid up to \$3/kg at that time!

The deer programme started through the joint efforts of myself and Les Porter. Les was a MAF field vet based in Dunedin while I had recently returned from overseas study leave and was looking for new directions at Invermay. He visited Prof Ian Coop at Lincoln and saw a few fenced deer in a paddock. Half of them had been hand reared and the rest were captured by Tim Wallis's operation. Ian said the captured ones were hopeless for behavioural reasons. He doubted they could be farmed and shut the programme down.

Ninety hinds were eventually "borrowed" on a complicated and bureaucratic arrangement from a joint venture between West Dome Station near Mossburn and Wilson Neill. They arrived at Invermay in October 1973 and produced about 60 calves. The original hinds later went off to Sir Peter Elworthy's property in North Otago.

Early research was almost all behavioural as we attempted to yard and move animals. Progress was slow and we shared our information through field days – some attracted more than 1,000 people. The fantastic thing about the early days at Invermay was the ability to hire from all animal science disciplines and these people did tremendous work in their fields. The programme was initially funded through FORST and with an annual budget of \$4.1m it was the biggest investment in any science programme at that time in New Zealand. In later years the deer industry co-funded deer science work at Invermay.

With improvement in management methods came big gains in animal growth and reproductive rates. High density of deer on farms exposed several significant health issues, chiefly Tb. The brilliant science collaboration between Prof. Frank Griffin and Invermay staff produced systems to identify Tb in deer and provide control measures. The research was recognised world wide.

In 1985, Invermay staff initiated an international deer biology conference, held in Dunedin. Several subsequent events were hosted overseas and the proceedings are still valuable texts about our knowledge of deer.

We have learnt a lot about deer over 50 years but there is still plenty to do. Environmental impacts and the thorny issue of greenhouse gases are among the areas needing more work. Huge progress in breeding and genetic selection has recently been made and will continue. I am amazed at the progress the deer industry has made in 50 years and confident that it will progress a lot further in the next 50. ■

– Ken Drew, retired AgResearch Invermay scientist

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Well done, P2P: What's next?

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Can we become a one-billion dollar industry? That was the challenge laid down by Agriculture Minister, Hon Damien O'Connor at a function at Parliament's Grand Hall on 13 September to celebrate the achievements of the Passon2Profit (P2P) programme.

O'CONNOR CONGRATULATED THE industry for the progress made during the seven years of the \$15m programme – “a lot of money in any terms” – and urged the industry leaders gathered there to think about building on that success.



Damien O'Connor challenged the industry to reach the billion dollar mark.

Commenting on the video compilation celebrating highlights from the on-farm and in-market aspects of P2P, O'Connor praised the clean, natural environmental imagery. Acknowledging that some in the rural sector are uncomfortable with the changes they are facing, he recalled the turbulence of the 1980s and noted how well agriculture had adapted and changed.

He had been excited by the potential of the deer industry as he saw it develop during that decade, and also by Cervena® when it was created. While not everyone bought into that initiative at the time, he's been heartened by the collaboration between companies through P2P, and sees that as the key to moving venison further up the value chain. That, and making better use of the deer farming infrastructure that's still in place to rebuild herd numbers, would be helping drive the industry towards that one billion dollar target.

In a media release marking the culmination of the programme, independent chair Bruce Wills said venison marketers had done a “fabulous job” pivoting to retail, with prices well on the way to recovering from a Covid-induced slump.

DINZ chair Mandy Bell, speaking at the reception, recalled the work leading up to P2P and the ambition to grow markets. Getting better uptake of the deer science focusing on genetic improvement, feeding and health was key to those aims. The peer group learning approach through Advance Parties and Environment Groups had proven a much better way of adopting best practice – with the help of trusted advisers.

DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat noted that 43 percent of deer farmers now had a Farm Environment Plan in place and a further 19 percent were “on the journey”. He added that the support and involvement of MPI had been essential to the development and delivery of P2P.

Bell noted that hundreds of rural professionals now have a much better understanding of the industry and how well deer integrate into pastoral farming systems, thanks to the P2P programme.

She acknowledged the challenges faced by marketing companies from the Covid pandemic, but noted recovery was well underway and new opportunities in the United States and China were complementing valuable markets in Europe.



Mandy Bell: We mustn't forget we are talking about changes for farmers.

“Looking ahead, we see the New Zealand vision of Te Taiao as exciting but to enable this vision to be achieved we need programmes that build on what we've learned during P2P. Developing and understanding the ‘how’ of delivery on farm, how to put integrated farm plans into action, how to make this easier for farmers.

“The need to do better in these respects is not unique to deer farming, it applies to all farming systems, and a majority of our farmers also run other species of livestock.”

She concluded by acknowledging the people who make all of this possible: deer farmers.

“When we talk about changes to farming practices, we must not forget we are talking about changes for farmers – good people who are doing a great job, producing superb protein foods that are sought-after in discerning markets. And in the case of most deer farmers, they are doing it with minimal impact on water quality.

“Change is needed, but we must never forget the people for whom these changes have a major impact on their everyday lives. Thanks to P2P, we now have skills to build the relationships and bridges needed to make these changes achievable.

“All we now need is the resources.” ■

- To watch the P2P video: <https://youtu.be/IEJemVmV5n4>



The celebration was started with a video compilation highlighting the achievements of P2P.

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P2P is for positives

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

People spoken to by *Deer Industry News* at the recent National Technical Workshop in Fairlie had only good things to say about the Passion2Profit programme as it approached its final weeks.

ABBY FRANCE, a rural manager with FMG Insurance and deer farmer said being part of P2P had meant a lot of things on the “to do” list got done. “It’s been a catalyst that’s ensured a lot of those initiatives have happened. It’s been fantastic.”

She said P2P has also put rural professionals in touch with the deer industry when they otherwise knew little about it.

Hamish Smith of Ben Dhu Station said being part of an Advance Party (AP) had helped “immensely” and meant they developed a focus on genetics and velvetting. “It’s been hugely beneficial to have like-minded farmers on our property seeing what we are doing.”

Justin Geary of NZ Farm Management has been an AP facilitator for 7 years. He confirmed that the farmer-to-farmer interaction was a big benefit from the programme. “Nutrition’s been one area for change and that’s flowed through to reproduction and productivity.”

South Canterbury velvet farmer **Sam Bray** said being in an AP has helped them focus on farm systems and managing any environmental issues around velvetting stags. That was flowing

through into other projects with NZ Landcare Trust. “We’re doing quite a few things differently now, whether it’s feeding or grazing management, right down to a few ideas in the shed.”

Danette McKeown has been part of a Deer Industry Environment Group for the past 4 years. She said being in the group opened people up to innovative ways of mitigating risks on farm through peer-to-peer learning. Exploring use of dung beetles and monitoring using eDNA were just two such ideas. “Having the ECan land management officers come and look at our farms also gave us a different perspective.” ■



Danette McKeown: Being part of a group has opened people up to innovation.

Strengthening Forrester bloodlines at Peel Forest Estate

FORRESTERS CONTINUE TO impress. While good growth rates are important, healthy, resilient deer with quiet temperament, strong constitution and correct conformation are equally important.

Peel Forest Estate’s Forrester deer programme’s outstanding advancements have been achieved by focusing on increasing productivity through superior genetics for English growth rates, higher-yielding carcasses through improved eye muscle, hardiness and heavy velvet. Increasing John’s resilience genetics further enhances profitability by reducing stock and production losses.

Another feature of the estate’s Forrester deer is high CARLA levels (parasite resilience), keeping them healthier over time, so important in your breeding hinds.

Forresters are, first and foremost, bred for their meat traits; however, velvet production matters. In today’s post-Covid-19 climate, it is more important than ever to achieve the maximum monetary potential out of yearlings before they are sent for

processing. “We want the spiker progeny to cut more velvet before they go to the works – it can add around \$1.50 per kilo more than the venison schedule price,” stud manager Mark Tapley says.

It is vital for farmers to select a diverse range of traits to develop the type of animal that is ideal for their farm topography, environment and management style, Mark says. “The days of picking a stag on the one specific trait of 12-month growth are gone.” ■

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Technical workshop draws strong interest

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

About 80 local deer farmers plus 40 exhibitors and presenters enjoyed a packed programme at the National Technical Workshop in Fairlie on 3 August.

Venison

Nick Taylor, DINZ market manager venison, started the day with a run through on the changing face of our venison markets. Key points included:

- schedule is back above its five-year average
- a continuing rise in importance of US and China markets
- strong chilled demand in the United States
- good work between New Zealand companies and their in-market partners, such as Alliance’s work with Grand Farms in China
- an expanded retail programme in the United States – for example, one venison company has their products in only 16 Californian supermarkets. That is just 0.1 percent of the potential for that channel so we are barely scratching the surface
- ground venison is a great “gateway drug” for the meat in US markets, helping Americans progress to higher-value cuts such as tomahawk or medallion steaks; strong demand for ground venison in that country is helping put upward pressure on trim prices in Europe
- after a tough period in Europe, things are improving with foodservice getting back to normal and prices increasing
- marketing activity in Europe is also firing up
- wholesaler Hanos stopped taking venison for three years but is now back on board with 17 items
- European meat importer Bimpex has developed new venison BBQ products
- there’s also plenty of marketing activity in New Zealand, for

example with recipes launched through *Women’s Weekly*, *Women’s Day* and *Dish*, plus a Matariki feature in *Kia Ora* magazine.

- remaining challenges included ongoing shipping issues with a shortage of containers, congested ports and some ports being skipped all together by shipping companies
- also, shipping delays shortening the shelf life of chilled product, meaning more reliance on expensive airfreight to get it to markets in good time.

In conclusion, Taylor said venison was still in recovery mode with logistical challenges remaining. He noted marketing companies had indicated the spring schedule was likely to peak at an average of \$9.

Velvet strength continuing

Another positive chapter in the New Zealand deer velvet story was spelled out by DINZ manager markets, Rhys Griffiths. He said that in the past 12 years, New Zealand production had doubled but farmgate value had quadrupled.

Returns for the 2021/22 season were likely to have exceeded \$120m, up from \$95.6m the previous season. This had velvet almost level pegging with venison in terms of total farmgate value – unthinkable 10 years ago.

Despite the ongoing rosy picture, velvet faced Covid-driven headwinds, just like venison has. Griffiths said supply chain logistics, economic uncertainties and a backlog of unprocessed stock in China meant it wouldn’t be all plain sailing this next season.

Thanks to the hard-line zero Covid approach in China with lockdowns affecting parts of the country including its biggest port and sole entry point for velvet (Dalian), the newly formed China Deer Velvet Coalition had had to drop its activities down a gear, but this was starting to pick up again.

Griffiths said that in Korea the traditional medicine sector was slowly declining, but this was more than compensated for by the rapid growth of healthy food products incorporating velvet. One such product was the sophisticated Sooshin Energy Shot. He said Yuhan Care was still strongly promoting the “New Zealandness” of the velvet in its products in Korea. Meanwhile Korea Ginseng Corporation was launching new velvet-based products in Taiwan and looking into Vietnam and Japan as potential markets.

Griffiths said the price instability that overseas velvet traders thrive on was to be avoided if at all possible. Looking ahead he said the medium term is positive and it’s possible velvet could top \$200



Mountain River Venison is reaching consumers through Instagram meat influencers in its developing Scandinavian market (see also article on page 16).

million in farmgate returns within a decade, “but we could still face potential headwinds getting there”.



Have a shot! Rhys Griffiths was handing out samples of the new velvet-based Sooshin Energy Shot product being sold in Korea.

NVSB, VelTrak and Code of Welfare tweaks

Our system for managing deer velvet removal through the NVSB programme, worked out in partnership with the veterinary profession is still regarded as world leading. It’s stood up remarkably well for more than a quarter century, but that’s not to say it can’t be improved.

DINZ general manager of quality assurance Rob Gregory updated the National Technical Workshop on changes that will strengthen the NVSB’s arm when it comes to enforcing its rules.

He said the NVSB doesn’t currently have the power to suspend someone from the programme while they are under investigation for an alleged breach that could jeopardise the whole industry. “This year the NVSB will be looking at strengthening the programme for the good of everyone.”

He reminded velvet farmers that it’s coming up to 5 years since the introduction of the Regulated Control Scheme, so it is timely to give renovated sheds a thorough going over, doing things like clearing cobwebs and touching up scuffed paint in clean zones. “Check the seals on your freezer, keep the outsides clean, is the underside of your grading table clean? Remember the auditors can look at anything.”

He said the bigger, heavier heads being grown now do bring potential welfare

challenges, so issues need to be watched for and addressed if they occur. “It’s about staying one step ahead of the regulators and being confident we can stand up to public scrutiny.” (In later discussion the welfare and velvet processing challenges from overgrown heads were again raised. There was some agreement that the emphasis could swing from pure weight to quality, composition, optimum harvest time and so on.)

On VelTrak, Gregory reminded the audience that it was designed as the result of a Chinese audit several years ago, which found our system wanting in some areas. For example, cable ties were prone to going brittle in freezers and breaking.

He said the first iteration of VelTrak had a few teething issues with the software and also the tags, which have been redesigned with better adhesive that covers a bigger area and survives freezing better. “But don’t just limply introduce the two parts of a tag when you apply it. Give the two sides a good squeeze and the adhesive should hold just fine.”

The wording for the VSD declaration had been streamlined to make it clearer too, he added. “We’re working with MPI to see if we can move to an annual declaration, similar to bobby calves. That would make things a lot simpler than having to do the VSD every time velvet is picked up.”

In conclusion Gregory said the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) was reviewing the Deer Code of Welfare. Apart from some minor technical updates in 2018 it hasn’t been reviewed since it came out in 2007. A working group of farmers has been working with MPI officials and the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC). (Update: the code is now available for comment with a deadline of 10 November. See sidebar below and: <https://www.mpi.govt.nz/consultations/proposed-code-of-welfare-for-deer>)

“Anyone can have a say on the draft Code, including the general public, so it’s really important that farmers are heard too. If we want our social licence to continue, we have to keep doing it better and better.”



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continued on page 10

Tech expo: continued

Positive response to updated Deer Code of Welfare

DINZ has responded positively to the draft of an updated Deer Code of Welfare, with most of the proposed changes reflecting good farming practice. The code was drafted by NAWAC after consultation with DINZ, deer vets, MPI, welfare groups and welfare experts. Of note in the new code are:

- duties and responsibilities of farmers are clarified
- minimum standards for milking deer
- more guidance on mating management and managing deer in enclosed spaces
- requirement for all farmers to have a written animal health plan based on veterinary advice
- prohibition of electro-immobilisation devices
- requirement for clean water to be provided in intensive winter grazing situations.

During October DINZ will consult with deer farmers before drafting a submission on the Code. Farmers and others whose work involves handling deer (e.g. vets, transport operators and stock agents) are strongly encouraged to read the draft code and to make their own submission before the 10 November deadline.

Winter nutrition – getting the balance right

Agricom's **Glenn Judson** ran a well-attended workshop on winter nutrition, emphasising that whether animals are indoors or outdoors, the dietary balance needs to be managed, but especially so indoors.

He said fodder beet (FB) is a good way to grow a lot of feed in a small area, which helped keep crop areas down for consenting purposes. FB is okay for maintenance while there is still leaf, but once it's just bulb there will be supplementation needed, especially for protein and calcium, he said.

Lucerne baleage is a good source of protein, but it needed to be fed "with something green". Judson advised testing baleage, especially if being fed indoors as part of the diet with grain. "A lot can go wrong," he warned. Stemmy red clover made very poor feed, he added. "You can end up with a forest of stem that's even worse than ryegrass stem."

Peas were an okay source of protein, but plenty was needed. Generally legumes were good sources of protein but they needed to be conserved at the right time.

With the climate warming, some parts of New Zealand such as



Glenn Judson: multi-species pastures okay only to a point.

Northland and Waikato were becoming unsuitable for ryegrass. Judson said cocksfoot could help fill the gap left by ryegrass but it needed careful management. Under irrigation it can be paired with white clover and on dryland the legume could be lucerne, red clover or a sub clover. "Cocksfoot is slow to establish, so give it a head start," he said. Fescue also needed a head start and either grass could be outrun by fast-growing herbs.

In discussion, AgResearch scientist Jamie Ward noted that animals kept indoors seemed to need less feed and energy input because they are warmer and not moving so much. And because the feed is warmer and drier than in the paddock, it takes less energy to digest.

Genetics update

DINZ Deer Select manager Sharon McIntyre updated attendees on the challenging process of updating the system, creating new groupings for indexes and what's involved with across breed (red and wapiti) evaluation. Part of the challenge was maintaining and calibrating genetic connections across herds, she explained.

The work was being done in part by recording performance of progeny from both red and wapiti sires over Invermay red hinds. This showed there was considerable overlap between the two breeds in terms of growth performance. The graph below shows that the progeny of one red sire are, kilo for kilo, matching the progeny of the three wapiti sires.

With red progeny there was more sexual dimorphism (a bigger weight difference between males and females). This was fine for breeding replacement hinds with stags going to slaughter, but not so good when all progeny were bound for slaughter. Reds vary in the degree of dimorphism and it is about matching sires to their purpose. The wapiti-cross progeny have the advantage here with the liveweight between males and females being more similar at younger ages and so better for terminal systems.

McIntyre said there were now 17 BVs, which made it harder to select stags based on the combination of traits that might be important to you. To overcome this, some BVs were being grouped into subindexes. These combined the relevant BVs – say meat values for carcass weight and lean yield – with an economic value.

These subindexes could then be grouped into overall indexes. For example a deer maternal index would combine subindexes for reproduction, growth, mature weight and meat, with an eye for both venison and breeding replacements. A terminal index would focus just on growth and meat and would put wapiti and red sires on a level playing field. McIntyre noted that some red sires with



Sharon McIntyre (left) was on hand at the Deer Select stand to answer queries.

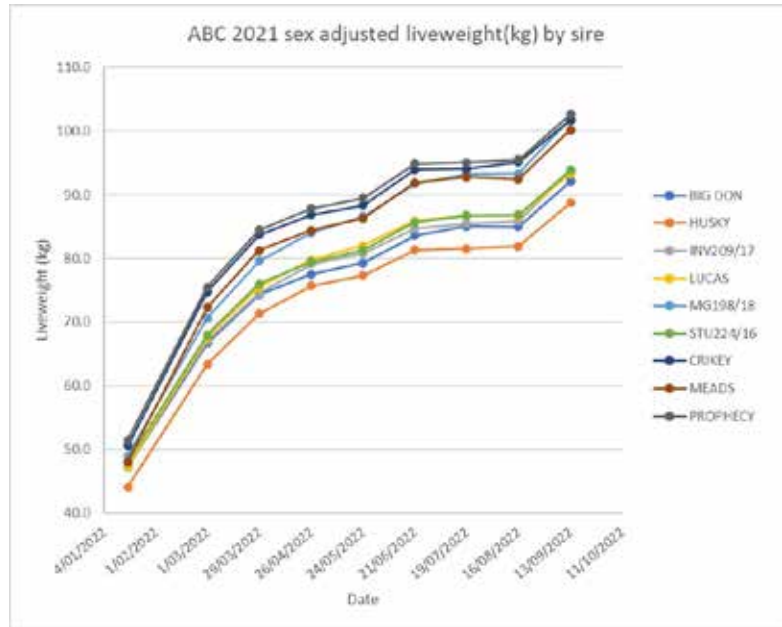
very high growth BVs were capable of leaving large daughters as well as sons, while other leave very large sons and smaller daughters. Sub-indexes and a few key overall indexes would make it easier for farmers to choose the animals that match their requirements.

The BVs for velvet and CARLA were kept separate at this stage. Velvet BVs are based only on weight for the time being, but McIntyre believes there is potential for new technologies such as 3-D cameras, tracking pedicle development or analysis of smoke from velvet cut by an ionisation knife to find out more about velvet traits that can be sheeted home to genetic profiles. That's all for the future though.

She said where herds are genetically connected, CARLA results can be meaningfully compared. Where a herd isn't connected with others, their own CARLA results are still useful for on-farm selection.

In a later discussion, McIntyre explained that Invermay has recently got prototype cattle chambers for accurately measuring methane emissions that may be suitable for deer (until now the lack of such facilities had been a barrier). It is unlikely to be practical to put large numbers of deer through the chambers but they would still be useful for calibrating proxy measures.

This could open the way to finding if there's a heritable trait for lower methane-emitting deer. In sheep, rumen samples and saliva samples are being assessed as proxies for chamber measurements, which would mean a lot more animals could be assessed for



The progeny of the three wapiti sires are, as expected, recording higher weights than the red progeny – except one red sire (light blue line, MG198/18) whose progeny are matching the wapiti's for growth. Graph courtesy Jamie Ward, AgResearch.

methane production. There are practical challenges to overcome for deer, however. For example, a deer's long neck makes it harder to easily get rumen fluid samples, but it's hoped saliva or other measures can be used instead.

continued on page 12

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Tech expo: continued

Genetic progress accelerating

Genetic progress in deer breeding herds has accelerated in recent years, especially following completion of the Deer Progeny Test. In a September update to the DINZ Board, Deer Select manager **Sharon McIntyre** highlighted the areas where we are seeing most movement.

Venison-focused herds

For the seven main venison herds, the annual rate of genetic gain for weight at 12 months (W12eBV) for the last five years has been +1.35 kg/year, well up from the 0.25 kg/year recorded between 2005–2010. There has also been a corresponding increase in the rate of gain for mature weight. The MWTeBV is currently increasing at just over 1 kg/year in the herds.

Velvet-focused herds

For the main velvet breeding herds, weight breeding values recorded on Deer Select have also shown steady progress. The BV for velvet weight at 2 years (VW2eBV) is increasing by 0.08 kg/year or 80 grams/year genetically. For mature velvet weight (MVWeBV), it is increasing by 0.13 kg on average.

Wapiti herds

Eight wapiti herds are recording for Deer Select. Wapiti have a lot of potential to increase size (W12) but breeders have been encouraged to also select for increased muscling at the same time, to avoid developing later-maturing, larger-framed animals.

As with the red venison herds, genetic gains in wapiti have accelerated in the wake of the Deer Progeny Test and Passion2Profit programme. For example, the W12eBV is currently improving by just over 1 kg/year, compared with 0.22 kg in the 2005–2010 period. (This cannot be compared directly to genetic progress in reds, as they are working from a different base.)

P2P a motivator

The P2P programme has also been a great motivator for breeders with more commercial farmers using BVs to target the right sire genetics for their systems. Last year, in the face of reduced venison prices, stags sale prices were similar or better than the year before, indicating that improving genetics was something the farmer could control and contribute to the bottom line.

What's up on the research front?

AgResearch scientist Jamie Ward gave a quick overview of where the deer science is shining its spotlights.

- Velvet research has been reintegrated after years of running under the old VARNZ structure. Current areas of work include product composition/functionality and quality, as well as work around welfare to support ongoing freedom to operate.
- The collars that are now widely used in the dairy industry are making an appearance in deer research but with purpose-built units that provide the raw (rather than interpretive) data that researchers need. An initial focus will be grazing and foraging behaviour and phenotyping the different behaviours of individuals. Later there might be data gathered on other

behaviours/conditions such as mating, fawning and health. Genotyping – finding genetic markers associated with different ways of foraging and using the landscape – would be the final step. Ultimately the data collected might help with development of collars to create the “virtual fences” that are already possible with cattle collars.

- As part of the hill and high country water quality research programme, eDNA samples are being collected to identify what living organisms have been in the water. The results will help confirm observations in the field and eventually could serve as a proxy for measuring waterway health.



eDNA samples are being collected as part of the hill and high country water quality study.

Winter grazing planning workshop

Deer farmer, environmental scientist and Deer Industry Environmental Group member Danette McKeown ran an intensive workshop in an intensive subject: planning for winter grazing.

If the winter grazing rules don't grab your attention, these facts and figures should:

- losing just 1mm of soil can mean up to 14 tonnes per hectare of soil lost
- a loss of 5 tonnes per hectare (noted in an Otago and Canterbury study of flat-rolling land) takes with it about 0.5 of an Olsen P unit
- one tonne of soil is about three-quarters of a cubic metre
- 10mm of soil takes anything from 100–400 years to form
- some winter feed paddocks on sloping land in Canterbury lose 5–50 tonnes of soil per hectare over winter
- by carefully managing critical source areas and grazing strategically, soil and nutrient losses from your farm can be reduced by 80 percent.

McKeown ran through the above startling figures as a way of highlighting to farmers that losses to “the environment” are not from some “other place”, but from their own properties. The workshop also covered the main features of the intensive winter grazing rules which come into effect from November



Danette McKeown presented some sobering facts about soil loss.

2022. We won't spell them out again here but you can see them at: <https://environment.govt.nz/acts-and-regulations/freshwater-implementation-guidance/intensive-winter-grazing/>

Workshop attendees were split into groups and given laminated aerial maps to work out a winter grazing plan for part of a farm. It was a good exercise with some animated discussion. The exercise showed that most farmers are aware of most of the "routine" best practices, including:

- graze from the top of the slope down
 - keep grass buffers at the bottom of the slope, with a minimum 5m buffer to waterways, longer where the slope is steeper
 - if back fencing, allow bigger breaks for deer than other stock classes
 - in order to "protect" paddocks from public gaze over the fence along roads consider a buffer of pines or flax for screening, or graze towards the fence with a crop such as tall kale
 - have a written grazing plan
 - don't graze or cultivate critical source areas (CSAs) between May and September inclusive
 - graze towards the prevailing weather, to provide some shelter
 - save dry, sheltered areas for shelter in wet weather
 - feed supplement well clear of waterways
 - use catch crops to take up nitrogen from urine and soil
- There were also a few additional useful tips and observations:
- CSAs can be hard to see when it's dry in summer so look during wetter periods or winter and define them on your farm map or easier still, take a photo
 - educate your contractors about where the CSAs are; you may need to mark them out with standards to avoid them being sprayed or drilled
 - depending on your stock water supply etc, it can be okay to graze the bottom of the slope first, early in the season when it's still fairly dry, then move stock to the top to graze down; just note it in your wintering plan
 - if you are using both crops and pasture over winter, graze the crops earlier before it gets too wet, then move to pasture




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continued on page 14

NVSB and velvetting reminders

Our industry is under more scrutiny than ever, including from regulators and overseas customers, so we need to show we are compliant with all aspects of the NVSB programme.

Administrative deadlines

- Please pay your NVSB fee promptly and by **20 November** at the latest.
- Make sure that your annual supervisory visit (consultation for mechanical block only) is completed by **December 15**.
- Return your completed drug records and any unused drugs to your supervising vet no later than **31 March**.

Practical

Most of these are common sense, but remember MPI now regularly tests velvet for drug residues. This is why keeping stags calm and good tourniquet practices are so important.

- Give stags enough time to settle after yarding, to minimise stress before velvetting.
- Apply a tight tourniquet to the pedicles *before* administering local anaesthetic. If this can't be done, then the velvet must not be sold for human consumption. It's as simple as that.
- Go through the NVSB Manual and be familiar with all its requirements, including those on diseases of velvet, locations of nerves and contingency responses.
- Practise good needle and drug hygiene. Best practice is to use a new needle for each stag.
- Make sure you can reverse chemical restraint safely. Talk to your supervising veterinarian if you have any concerns in this area.
- Make sure any blood loss is under control before removing

tourniquets. If using physical restraint, check that the pressure on the stag is not too great, as this can make the problem worse.

- Let stags recover in a quiet paddock with good shade, plenty of food and clean water. Avoid locations close to a road or footpath, as this can increase stress and lead to unwanted outcomes.

Regulatory

- Keep deer sheds clean when velvetting.
- Disinfect velvet removal instruments between stags.
- Check that freezers used to store velvet can maintain a minimum ambient temperature of -15°C (lower is better) and that they contain only velvet.
- Log into VelTrak (<https://veltrak.velvet.org.nz>) and check that your business details, including your veterinary practice, are correct.
- Tag all velvet intended for human consumption with official VelTrak tags. If velvet won't securely hold a tag, e.g. spiker or regrowth, then put it in a bag and tag the bag.

Only registered veterinarians or certified velvetters are legally allowed to remove deer velvet and use VelTrak tags. If you are not certified to remove deer velvet or have a deer shed that needs auditing for compliance with the Regulated Control Scheme, please contact DINZ on 04 473 4500. ■

- **This article first appeared in last month's DINZ eNews.**

Tech expo: continued

- put out baleage in crop paddocks in advance, in case it's too wet to get a tractor in there later
- cows lie down less when it's too wet, leading to exhaustion, and poor feed usage – deer are probably the same. ■
- This was a Passion2Profit event, funded through DINZ and the Ministry for Primary Industries.



Veterinarian Anna Cornorth (centre) talking over winter grazing options with other group members at the technical workshop.

He Waka Eke Noa: What we're doing about it for the industry

Many farmers are understandably concerned about how greenhouse gas (GHG) levies will affect the economic viability of running deer, especially where there is little or no opportunity to offset or reduce emissions. DINZ board chair **Mandy Bell** and chief executive **Innes Moffat** update the situation with regard to the He Waka Eke Noa (HWEN) or NZ emissions trading scheme (NZETS) proposals.

WE SHARE FARMERS' concerns but, at the same time, the DINZ Board has had to be hard-headed about the situation we are in.

1. **Farm emissions are going to be priced**, in some form or another, from 2025. None of us like this, but rejecting emissions pricing is not a battle we can win. It is already part of the Zero Carbon Act that has the support of the main political parties.
2. **Only two options for GHG pricing are on the table:** the HWEN proposal and the NZETS. DINZ has voiced concerns over the impact of the HWEN proposal within the partnership. But be assured, if you are unhappy with the HWEN proposal, going into the NZETS would be far worse.
3. **We are a very small voice** when it comes to developing government policy. Deer emissions may account for only 1.6% of the emissions from NZ agriculture, but we are expected by government and other players in agriculture to pay our share.
4. **We don't know how the government will respond** to the HWEN proposal. We expect this to be released later this month. But we have been very clear in our discussions with government officials and key ministers that the final HWEN proposal will have a major impact on deer farms that have no means to reduce or offset their emissions. This includes low intensity operations that otherwise have minimal impact on the natural environment.

How government will balance its concerns about GHG emissions, water quality and biodiversity is unknown, but the need to achieve such a balance gives us hope that the final policy framework will not be as dire as some predict. In the meantime, we are working with an expert consultant to help us prepare our submissions on your behalf when the Government releases its policy proposals.

What we've done on your behalf

Some are concerned that DINZ has not done enough to represent your interests within HWEN. DINZ has done its best, as a very small player, to represent your interests in the development of a system for pricing agricultural gases that is better than the Emissions Trading Scheme. We have strongly and consistently highlighted the impact the HWEN proposals will have on deer farms that have little or no opportunity to reduce their emissions. These concerns have been also been expressed in strongly worded public statements (you can find them on the DINZ website).

Compromise is a reality

A proposal that needed the support of major players in farming,

iwi and government was always going to include compromises. But when push came to shove, the DINZ board decided to support the HWEN proposal going to government. This was the only way we could continue to have a voice in the further development of GHG pricing policies and it was politically important for all industries to be seen to be on board.

We did not get many of the things we argued for as a HWEN partner, but we did get the agreement of the partners that where farms have no access to sequestration or mitigation, some form of levy relief should be included in the initial pricing package. Our concerns for farms in this situation have also been acknowledged by the Climate Change Commission and by government ministers and officials.

Incentivise farmers, don't punish

Under the system agreed by the HWEN partners, gases are charged by weight and each kilo of methane emitted is charged at the same rate. Our approach has consistently been that farmers should be incentivised to reduce their emissions, once the technology becomes available, not punished for the absolute level that different systems emit due to biology.

When the government response to the HWEN recommendations is released we will continue to make these points to the policymakers directly and through the submission process.

The benefits of deer

Deer are wonderful animals that produce wonderful products – that's why we farm them. They are also a great fit in mixed livestock farming systems on many classes of country, producing high-quality protein and health food ingredients from country that is often unsuitable for other forms of food production.

We cannot be certain where those attributes will fit in the farming systems of the future. Public attitudes to food production systems and the foods we eat are changing rapidly. At the same time, climate change is accelerating and the world population is continuing to grow.

Change is coming

One thing is certain, change is coming and deer farming in the future will not look like farming in the past. We all – and that includes DINZ – need to be agile and responsive to opportunities as they arise.

continued on page 18

Targeting high value in Scandinavia

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Mountain River Venison’s marketing director John Sadler is excited by the arrival of the Northern Hemisphere autumn. The exporter has just launched a new game season promotion for New Zealand venison in Scandinavian supermarkets targeting the region’s affluent customers.

“NOW COVID APPEARS to have finished, everything seems to be in place,” he says, for what he hopes will be a successful game season for Mountain River Venison and for New Zealand venison in the region.

Scandinavian consumers have a strong venison eating tradition and are willing to pay for good quality meat. In addition, it has a long game season, starting in October and running through to March–April.

Planned activity earlier in the year was delayed partly by Covid-19’s Omicron variant and rescheduled for a September start. “This is when people are starting to think about eating game,” Sadler explains.

The delay had another upside. Low-key promotional activity underway during the summer, had enabled the team to learn what the market wants and to tailor its offering accordingly.

A range of fresh cuts have been added to the company’s Nature’s Way-branded range: steaks, roasts, tri-tip and charcuterie, including smoked venison and salamis. A hamburger was also trialled over the summer, received a positive response and will play a greater part in Mountain River Venison’s retail offering.

But, Sadler explains, product positioning for high value means, “As a niche product, we don’t want huge volumes. We want to get the value and to get distribution in the right segment.

“It’s a trade-off between selling good quantities but also getting value and working within the supply or availability of product, and the value we can sell it for.”

Another big move has been from selling frozen cuts, “where sales were below target”, to a thawed chilled product range,



Chef Patrik Winterberg (left) demonstrating minced venison Korean Style in Swedish supermarket ICA Taby Centrum, with Mountain River Venison’s Swedish representative Mikael Granberg (right).

“where presentation at premium retail is much more appealing”.

Frozen shipment offers big advantages in providing a quality product to a consumer, he believes. “We can optimise the growth of the deer, shipping’s as low cost as you can achieve, and then we prepare the product in-market for the consumer.”

He also believes the value is there for some of the leg cuts, which present, “as well on the plate as a striploin, but we’ve got to educate the consumer about that”.

To support that, an array of new upmarket recipes, developed over summer, are now up at the new Swedish/English language website www.mountainrivereu.com, along with other materials.

Sales and distribution staff were updated in September, ready for the new season, with the latest information about the product and range and there has been a new round of in-store tastings.

These follow a series earlier this year in high-end supermarkets in Stockholm, Copenhagen, Oslo and Gothenberg, appearances at distributors’ events, and public relations activity including on social media. “Continuously repeating the message is really important.”

The company is continuing its Instagram association with meat influencers such as Henning Kvicken, who has 143,000 followers on Instagram, and is also a distributor sales manager.

The first busy in-store tasting demo earlier this year saw the team handing out 300 servings and selling 76 packs of the featured mince pack – *hjortfärs* – and 89 packs of medallions to customers at one top-end Stockholm supermarket – ICA Taby Centrum.

The activity has been accelerated by the DINZ Market



Mountain River Venison’s Swedish Instagram campaign continues, with this dish – Venison with scorzonera and potato gratin, spring vegetables and red wine gravy.

Game season off with a bang: NZ Venison BBQ Week

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Exporters are gearing up for the game season, which was set off with a bang this year with the new NZ Venison BBQ Week (10-17 September). Events were being held around the world.



WITH FOODSERVICE REOPENING in various markets, DINZ venison marketing manager Nick Taylor explains disrupted activities for the DINZ programme had been melded together into one big week of events, picking up on Hunter McGregor's initiative last year to launch BBQ NZ Venison Week.

"This aims to build demand for New Zealand venison at the start of the important game season, where the sector can maximise returns for high-value chilled product," he says.

DINZ consultant chef Shannon Campbell was busy at events in Germany and Europe, where Campbell says the market continues to be "defiantly buoyant despite all the negative pressures on demand".

Reconnecting with contacts and making new ones was the aim.

NZ venison on show at Embassy

DINZ organised an event at the New Zealand Ambassador's residence in Berlin on 13 September. The menu was created and prepared by a guest chef, the youngest ever Michelin-starred female chef and Germany's 2020 chef of the year, Julia Komp.

"We were so excited to have Julia at our event," says Taylor. "She

is one of the most talented chefs in Germany at the moment and prepared a number of wonderful dishes showcasing venison."

The guest list included representatives from Hello Fresh Germany, the official caterer for the German federal parliament, the Bundestag, and editors from several German food magazines.

"This is the first big event done since Covid, and it was the perfect way for us to kick off our game season promotion.

The event offered the opportunity for us to show off our wonderful product in a variety of ways," he says.

Komp told guests her restaurant concept is to take people to all the places she has travelled. "I have never travelled to New Zealand but the quality of the venison, its tenderness and flavour profile, have me hoping I can



Julia Komp speaking to the guests about the menu.

continued on page 18

Scandinavia: continued

Innovation Fund (MIF), set up at the end of 2020 to support the sector's response to Covid-19. DINZ allocated \$400,000 of its reserves to support the launch of a new venison range at retail from Alliance and its in-market partner Grand Farm in China, and the launch of venison onto First Light's new online store in the

United States.

"It takes a lot of effort," says Sadler. "With help from DINZ funding, we have been able to put quite a bit more effort into presenting our brand and also the New Zealand origin story of the product to the consumer." ■

Game season: continued

add this to my list,” she said. “It really is a top-quality product.”

Alongside her signature dish, on the Komp-inspired menu was venison tenderloin with cured quail’s egg yolk, fermented asparagus and cucumber, venison karaage with mojo verde, apple and celery and lemon, and slow-cooked venison shoulder with elderberries, jus, mizuna gremolata and soy butter brioche.

Komp has since ordered New Zealand venison cheeks and striploin to add to her new menu.



Julia Komp’s signature dish for the NZ Embassy menu: cherry blossom, cherry, beets, jus and pistachio with venison striploin with Japanese plum butter, burdock root, pea puree and infused honey.

Fine food days with Silver Fern Farms’ NZ venison

Ahead of BBQ Week, Campbell helped Silver Fern Farms and its in-market partner at the two-week Fine Food Days in Cologne.

New Zealand venison was on show at the opening event on 21 August with about 300 guests.

Another event was held at KölnSky, opposite Cologne Cathedral, with two sessions on 29 August. At midday, 18 chefs/industry/bloggers were educated about the flexibility of New Zealand venison for their menus. Later on that evening, 50 paying diners were treated to a four-course menu with accompanying wine, while also learning from Campbell how to properly cut a venison leg and “prepare it perfectly”.



As well as her stint as guest chef at the DINZ event at the New Zealand Embassy in Berlin, Julia Komp was a VIP guest at the KölnSky midday event.

At Fine Food Days’ closing gala, finger foods included Silver Fern Farms New Zealand venison, prepared by Shannon Campbell.

Campbell is pleased to see importers stepping back into promoting New Zealand venison over autumn and winter in Europe. New Zealand venison’s competitive pricing in relation to other sources of animal protein was helping, he believes, alongside pent-up demand from restaurant-goers, leading to full tables for restaurants.

“I am positive that we will be able to get together over the coming months and take back togetherness as a social norm and look forward to placing New Zealand venison at the centre of those celebrations.”



Cologne Fine Foods’ Instagram feed noted on 31 August, “Even at the grand opening, it quickly became clear that the New Zealanders offer top-quality culinary products.”

Taco Pop-Up At Maria Bonita’s

On 10 September, New Zealand venison was included in a Taco Pop-Up in Berlin’s most popular and authentic Mexican restaurant, Maria Bonita’s.

“They included us as part of their popular kitchen takeover series,” Campbell says.



New Zealand venison on the menu at Berlin’s Maria Bonita’s Mexican restaurant.

New BBQ events in Shanghai

New this year were three events in Shanghai, China. Earlier events had to be rescheduled

HWEN: continued

We are confident there are many opportunities waiting to be uncovered for additional income to be generated from deer, as well as from land-based products and services that complement deer farming. Once the GHG and freshwater regimes have been finalised, we will be able to get on with developing these opportunities.

We thank those of you who have been in touch with us to discuss GHG pricing policies, the HWEN proposal in particular. We understand your concerns and appreciate your support.

Advocacy is a priority

Advocating for deer farmers as GHG pricing policies are being developed is a priority for DINZ. We will keep you informed of new developments as they arise. We will also ask you, when submissions are called for, to submit on behalf of your own businesses and in support of submissions by DINZ and the DFA.

By working together we will have the greatest chance of successfully promoting the interests of our industry, as well as the interests of our deer farming families. ■

due to lockdowns that affected earlier activities, while China continues its zero-Covid policy.

The first was a smaller, more intimate Western chef's table for a number of chefs cooking in the Western style.

The second was a Chinese chef's table. Chefs cooking in the traditional culinary styles were shown how to use New Zealand venison in the modern Cantonese culinary style and given the opportunity to create their own dishes.

"The aim was to educate them about the product and how it can be used," says Taylor.

Finally, a wider barbecue event for over 50 guests, drawn from chefs, influencers and customers, was held outdoors at a restaurant with grills.

"We were introducing the protein to a wider audience," says Taylor.



Chinese chefs gathered to learn more about New Zealand venison.

Social media for New Zealand

Here in New Zealand, activities on social media were the focus of a DINZ campaign.

Four Instagram influencers, with a combined following of over 106,000 – @fiona_hugues, @food2belly, @hercules_noble_food and @nourishandtemp – were tasked with producing recipes ahead of the week to encourage people to participate.

DINZ also ran a Facebook competition to give away a BBQ and a personal chef experience. The lucky winner will have dinner for eight cooked in their own home by DINZ executive chef Graham Brown.



One of the dishes produced by Chinese chefs to introduce New Zealand venison to Chinese palates.

Strong demand, prices up for chilled

Meanwhile, the sector has been gearing up for the small but important window of the chilled season, which runs to the end of October. Signals continue for strong demand and improved pricing, tempered by the ongoing logistics issues.

While farmers have been working to get deer up to target weights and

processors were getting ready for the season, exporters and their in-market partners have been busy on the sales trail. Most had concluded their chilled negotiations, had been sharing their price expectations with their suppliers and firmed up contracts.

At the time of writing (mid-September), the first deer to reach target weights were trickling into the plants.

Most of Mountain River Venison suppliers for its chilled customers in the United States, Netherlands, France and Germany had signed chilled contracts for a farmgate peak price of \$9.30 per kg, says director John Sadler.

While exporters will look to get the best prices they can, he points to rising costs for airfreight and other services for exporters and importers. "Customers [in Europe] are cautious. Inflation is an issue for them and the [Ukraine] war is an even bigger issue. It's quite hard to predict," he says.

"There will be a point where the market – consumers and chefs – will say 'I'm not going to pay that extra for chilled'. We will put our chilled prices up a lot and the costs are up a lot. Will the chefs still buy? We don't know yet."

Matt Gibson, First Light's general manager venison, has been flat out with the game season and reports strong demand for chilled product. "Sea freight has been a challenge, but we're managing to get the job done and looking to extend the season using airfreight," he says.

Alliance, currently meeting suppliers at annual roadshow events around the country, has concluded its game season chilled negotiations, "with demand exceeding supply," along with improved pricing, it reported in its August *Brief Bites* newsletter.

"Diversification remains the key to ensuring the market is favourable," it notes.

Silver Fern Farms also indicated improved pricing for its products in the August *DINZ eNews*. Its general manager sales Peter Robinson is confident in the sector strategy to rebuild venison returns.

"This is how we best position ourselves to capture greater value as the market overcomes its current supply chain and inflationary pressures," he says.

EU demand for chilled "has been firm," Duncan NZ's general manager marketing and operations Rob Kidd agrees.

There are signs of slight improvements for international shipping schedules, but the continuing recovery in all markets – Europe, Asia and North America – will be vital, says Kidd.

"We believe the foodservice sectors will continue on their recovery trajectory. Demand driven through this channel is the key." ■



John Sadler, Mountain River Venison.

Barnstorming: Northerners look at indoor wintering

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

There's growing interest amongst North Island and top-of-the-South deer farmers in indoor wintering systems, with a couple of Waipa farmers already setting up sheds following a recce to Southland in 2021.



Indoor wintering – mitigating the challenges of wintering in Southland at Michelle and Tony Roberts'. (Photo: Nicola McGrouther)

A FURTHER TRIP was organised this year, with eight farmers heading down to experience a Southland winter in late June, seeing the wintering sheds on several properties in action. They were joined by an additional 35 Southland and South Otago farmers, and hosted by the Southland Environment Advance Party, facilitated by Nicola McGrouther.

They visited John and Mel Somerville, Bruce and Robyn Allan, Doug and Nikki McCall, Michelle and Tony Roberts, and Cam and Wally Nelson. There was also a meal stop at Sharon and Peter McIntyre's to look at their fallow, velvetting and deer milking operation and discuss winter barn costs with David Stevens from AgResearch. The northerners were hosted for breakfast on day two by Dave Lawrence and Donna Day's Tikana, where genetics were discussed.

During a debrief after the tour, the hosts commented that successful wintering needs attention to detail, keeping animals well fed and watching out for any bullying or social problems in the mobs. For fawns, a drench was advised before going into the sheds. *Yersinia* was another health issue to watch out for with younger stock.

Environmental issues were also of interest to the visitors, including the best way to dispose of bedding, and ensuring any runoff from the barns is appropriately contained. Bedding accounts for about a quarter of the cost of wintering.

It was noted that modern sheds tend to be more open and light with better ventilation than some of the earlier ones.

Feed systems vary, and the Southlanders have generally developed their own methods following a bit of trial and error. One important rule is to make sure feed goes onto dry ground. All

agreed it's important to check feed quality to ensure animals are getting what they need.

The hosts commented that the animals remained relaxed during the visit, despite the dozens of strangers peering at them and poking cameras through the openings.

Because life is a bit easier indoors than outside during a Southland winter, older stags that might have otherwise done their dash can eke out a bit more productive life when they are wintered indoors.

Other key lessons from the tour

- Get animals used to the winter diet before they go indoors.
- Use a good high-protein feed and supplement with something like nuts if needed.
- If young stock are wintered indoors they'll have a lifetime of calmer temperament.
- Don't overcrowd them – if you do, their behaviour will deteriorate.
- Design a shed to suit the site and environment, e.g. take account of prevailing winds.
- Have the barn/s near your deer yards in case any drafting is needed.
- Deer are crafty. One farmer left the gap a little too wide for deer to get their heads through to feed, and some figured out how to roll through and away.
- Because deer are warmer and using less energy you use less feed and therefore are saving money. That means less emission of methane – something we need proper data on. ■



Males housed at Tikana. Feed must be greater than 20 percent crude protein to ensure pedicle development and lifetime velvet production is optimised. Bedding (wood shavings and straw) is composted for 12 months then recycled onto paddocks for winter crop. (Photo: Nicola McGrouther)

Making money from venison the easy way

For some easy extra dollars at slaughter time, make sure you buy sires with higher meat trait values, writes **Dave Lawrence**.

WE ALL GET paid for the venison product we grow based on carcass weight at slaughter. A higher carcass weight gives a greater return. In these days of rising costs for farming, is there a way to produce more carcass weight for no extra cost?

There most definitely is, and this low-hanging fruit is already out there, waiting for you to pick it. Carcass weight is all about meat – dressing-out percentage and meat-to-bone ratio.

Genetics can seem like a big black hole, too complicated to get involved in. But we all understand what every extra kg of venison at slaughter means to us, and the meat trait to get you there is actually easy to get your head around.

Both terminal sire and maternal replacement sire breeders have been selecting for this particular meat trait for many years now (in fact these breeders have increased the industry average value of this trait five-fold in the past five years).

Put simply, a sire with a high meat trait value will produce progeny with a higher dressing-out percentage, putting more dollars in your pocket. An additional bonus is that higher meat-trait deer produce more tender and succulent venison – a significant customer experience attribute.

This meat trait in deer – the EMaCeBV* – is based on an ultrasound scan of their progeny's eye muscle at around 10 months old. The value of this meat BV indicates genetically what that sire will pass onto his progeny – the higher the value, the higher the dressing-out percentage.

One word of caution here when assessing sire information on this trait. Some sale catalogues publish not only the BV (breeding value) for EMA (eye muscle area) but also the raw data. Raw eye muscle data can be misleading. Larger animals will have larger eye muscle areas than smaller individuals, but the important question is whether they are *above average* for their size. The raw data for eye muscle area should be pretty much ignored because it's a reflection of timing – when the calf was born and when it was scanned.

At time of scanning, a larger yearling (e.g. the fawn of MA hind born mid-November) will of course have a bigger eye



Yearlings are normally ultrasound scanned in October.

muscle than a smaller yearling (e.g. the fawn of first calver born in late December). Also the time of scanning, which is spread over two months in spring, will affect the actual measurement, which reflects a point in time. On its own, this raw data gives no indication of how much of the trait will be passed on to progeny.

The breeding value is a different story though. It is corrected for size – so individuals with relatively higher values for EMaCeBVs have a genuine genetic advantage. Their above-average muscling will result in progeny with extra muscling. Conversely, animals with negative or low values for EMA have below average muscling for their size – not something you want! This meat trait BV indicates exactly what a sire will pass on to his progeny.

Breeding values are presented in the unit you measure them in, so for eye muscle area the BVs are in square centimetres. Venison sires (red and wapiti) with progeny in the past three years have EMaCeBV values ranging from +4cm² to -2cm². The average for venison sires is +0.85cm².

A good venison sire should be good for growth and positive for muscling. If selecting on growth alone (e.g. weight at 12 months) you can end up with larger-framed animals that can be later maturing (developing muscling).

EMaCeBV is not the only useful meat BV in Deer Select. There is also the LEANYeBV or Lean yield BV. A positive value for this BV indicates more kg of venison boned off a carcass at a standard weight. While LEANYeBV is an excellent meat BV and can also be considered when selecting sires, it is not commonly publicised because eye muscle area is easier to envisage.

*Eye Muscle Area – carcass-weight-adjusted estimated Breeding Value ■



Dimensions of the eye muscle are recorded from the screen shot.

Full platters on the plateau for Next Generation

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The 56 young deer farmers who made the trip to Ohakune for a Central North Island Next Generation programme on 11-12 August went home well informed and extremely well fed, as the Taihape–Ruapehu DFA showed off the best the region has to offer.

That included visits to three well-known and contrasting deer farms, plus stonkingly impressive catering on both days. **Sean de Lacy** and **Mark McCoard** did all the hard mahi putting the event together. Sponsors for the event included **PGG Wrightson**, **Ravensdown**, **FirstLight**, **La Vida Livestock**, **Totally Vets** and **Duncan New Zealand Venison**.

Waihi Pukawa

First stop was the iconic Waihi Pukawa Station, run by the Waihi Pukawa Maori Trust. The Trust has two properties: Waihi Pukawa Station near Tokaanu at the south end of Lake Taupō, and Taurewa Station at National Park. They are about 1.5 hours apart, by tractor. The properties are roughly the same size and total 5,335 hectares. They run 13,000 ewes (MA and 2th) and 3,400 hoggets (two-thirds are mated). There are also 800 beef cattle and 7,000 red hinds.



Mark McCoard (left) and Sean de Lacy from the Taihape-Ruapehu DFA put together a great programme.

Most of the hinds are run at Taurewa Station and finishing done at Waihi Pukawa which is at a slightly lower altitude. While the focus is definitely on venison, the Trust is developing a velvetting herd, currently cutting about 4.5 tonnes and targeting average weights of 5.5 kg for 3-year and older stags.

The genetics for the deer herd come from a wide range of sources with plenty of thought given to the best fit for the farming

system, in which the venison and lamb production complement each other well.

Peel Forest and Wilkins sires are used for maternal genetics, while Ruapehu Red Deer, Melior and Wilkins sires are used for both breeding and as terminals. In the past, B11s and wapiti have been used. Genetics from Netherdale, Altrive and Peel Forest are used for velvet.

Manager **Colin Gates** explained they are aiming for a mature hind weight of 120–125 kg, with replacements reaching 105–110 kg by 15 months of age. They are targeting scanning percentages in the high 90s, with fawn wastage in R2s less than 10 percent.

Gates said Waihi Pukawa had achieved carbon zero status in May this year and was the first Maori Trust and first sheep, beef and deer property to reach this milestone that he knew of. Their cattle are sold through Taupo Beef, giving them a premium for their environmental credentials and they are hoping to achieve the same for their wool. Gates said they had achieved their carbon zero status through Overseer. “You have to go through a whole process, looking at all of the offsets available.” Some trees that don’t qualify under the ETS do qualify for the Toitū carbon zero certification, he said.

On a tour of the farm he said some hinds and new fawns are run on a rape/plantain/clover mix, which they do well on through summer. The mix gets a burst of urea in autumn and the weaners go back onto it for the winter. “We get two whacks at it,” he said.

Once the plantain has done its dash the paddocks are sprayed out killing all but the clover, and fescue and cocksfoot are drilled in. Ragwort is a perennial problem on the property. “The sheep help [control it] but they always eat the grass first,” Gates said. “You could spray it, but it would kill the clover.”

He said a lot’s been invested in fencing and deer lanes.

There are still the remnants of a sawmill on the property from the days when native timber was exploited in the 1930s. Trustee Wally Kingi



Colin Gates: Environmental regulations creating hard work for farmers.

said the logging, which used to support a small village of about 40 people and a school, finished in the late 1940s.

Thanks to much improved vector control, Tb is not the problem in the area that it used to be. Gates said the farm is on triennial testing at present.

What a lunch!

When the group returned to the Waihi Pukawa woolshed for lunch (sponsored by **FirstLight**) they found it had been transformed into a swanky restaurant with a three-course meal and a fine sampling of wines and beer.

The team preparing the food was led by chef **Tyson Burroughs**, who runs the US roadhouse-themed Rustic Steak Houses in Taihape and Waiouru. The three courses were:

- **Venison burgers.** Burroughs kept the mince pink and used plenty of butter and cheese to maintain moistness. Balsamic vinegar and Worcestershire sauce provided some piquancy, plus some plum and tamarillo chutney for depth, caramelised onion for sweetness and a bit of aioli on the bun. (Pretty good! Wait, what, there's more??)
- **Venison shanks.** Burroughs is keen to see more shanks available and thinks they're underrated. These were flavoured with juniper berries and red currants, and had a nice smoky flavour. Delicious. (I was starting to feel full at this point, but soldiered on in the interests of good journalism.)
- **Back steaks.** Burroughs said these are a more expensive cut but you only need a small portion (Amen to that. Ed.) He prepared these with a horopito rub, lightly grilled them and rested for 20 minutes. They were served with roasted mushrooms and a Jerusalem artichoke puree, whose earthy flavours complemented the tannins in the wine.

Did I mention the wine? Yes, there was a well-chosen selection including a Syrah and Pinot Noir from **Villa Maria**. And for those who prefer the hop to the grape there was a great local brew, a



The Waihi Pukawa woolshed became a restaurant for lunch on day one.

hazy IPA courtesy of newly established Waiouru brewery, **Desert Drops**.

Venison market briefing

DINZ board member and FirstLight managing director **Gerard Hickey** gave his perspective on the current state of play for venison in a Q+A session.

He noted that China was underpinning the high prices for lamb at present, with their strong demand for cheaper value (to us) cuts. "Twenty years ago lamb flaps were



Chef Tyson Burroughs said he uses venison in his restaurants when he can, and is currently featuring a dish using Denver leg.

continued on page 24

Early calving date for the WIN!

BIG GEOFF IS an imposing Maternal sire delivering exceptional early calving date genetics. Since his inclusion in our Wilkins Farming Co breeding programme, he's continued to excel in many traits producing good all-round progeny, but of particular note are his superior calving date results that are **amongst the top in New Zealand**.

Big Geoff's calving date EBV (CDeBV) stands out amongst his peers at -7.8 days, i.e., calving 7.8 days earlier than the "norm". (The average on Deer Select is only -3 days for animals recorded on both the European and English types.) For a sire to offer solid meat yield and growth rate combined with superior calving date traits, Big Geoff really does offer the ultimate when breeding replacement hinds.

Having fawns on the ground earlier than others should help better match your pasture growth curve and increase weaning weight by maximising the peak lactation period. Your herd improvement rate becomes exponential, as the overall genetic performance increases.

In our annual stud sales, we are offering a selection of Big Geoff sons who, like their sire, boast CDeBVs of up to -7.8 days. We'd love to hear from you. www.wilkinsfarming.co.nz ■

- Article supplied



Next Generation: continued

worth \$1 a kilo. In China they're now worth \$13."

FirstLight was active in the Middle East market where venison isn't well known but there is a ready market driven by European-style restaurants. He said the company had that market to itself for venison at present.

On the "5th quarter" components of the carcass (tendons, pizzles, etc) Hickey said these account for about 20 percent of the carcass value – much more than in other stock classes – and had taken a hit during Covid, as had the petfood market. "These products are still only at about 80 percent of where they were in value."

When Covid struck, the venison industry was over-exposed to restaurants, but there had been a successful pivot to retail and investment in new, more stable markets. "This will help get venison to the \$10-\$12 range, where it needs to be." He emphasised that with the growth in the velvetting sector there would be more cull stags in the mix. "We don't need more spent velvetters though."

Hickey predicted the schedule could hit \$10 this spring and \$12 by the following spring.



David Rangihu of Desert Drops set up a barrel by the shearing stands.



Richard Painter and Karen Harmon of Villa Maria set up a wine display amongst the wool bales.

He said the traditional focus on restaurants was for a good reason. "It's easy to stuff up cooking venison. But chefs know what they are doing." That said, changing tastes had made venison more accessible to retail customers who wanted grass-fed, lean and nutritious meat.

Tenderness could be influenced by how hard a particular muscle had worked during its life, but the trend to slow cooking had helped address tenderness issues.

Supply of venison could become an issue. So far it had been supported by cull hinds coming through, but that wasn't sustainable in the longer term. (DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat, also in attendance, said an estimated 20,000 breeding hinds had gone from the national herd. To maintain stable herd numbers, the

Branch chair profile: Jason Rentoul

Jason Rentoul is chair of the NZDFA's Marlborough branch. He's the fourth generation of his family to be running the property, a mixed livestock operation on 1,400 hectares at Wye Hills in the Wairau Valley.

ALTHOUGH IT'S BEEN a little damper than normal this year in Marlborough, he usually records 1,100 mm of rainfall and it is summer dry.

The farm is mostly hill, with just 95 hectares of flats and 54 hectares irrigated. The property runs from 260 m up to 1,120 m. Four hundred and fifty hectares is in the ETS with native regeneration serving as a carbon sink.

There are 1,200 deer comprising 500 hinds, 220 velvetters and finishing stock. In addition there are 85 Angus cattle plus 3,220 sheep of which 650 are crossbred and the balance Merino. All



Jason Rentoul: Specialist seed crops are giving way to more deer.

percentage of the total kill for hinds needed to drop from the current 56 percent down to 48 percent.)

Hickey said the signs for the traditional European market were looking good, “but we mustn’t abandon our new retail customers”. Shipping costs had almost doubled from about US\$3,000 per container to US\$5,000–6,000. This situation wasn’t likely to ease soon, as global shipping patterns were changing.

Asked about carcass size and demand for larger elk/wapiti style, Hickey said there was demand for larger cuts in the United States and FirstLight would be exploring the options for carcasses there in the 70–100 kg range.



Gerard Hickey: We must look after our newer retail customers.

Meanwhile for velvet...

Tony Cochrane, velvet manager for PGG Wrightson and also a DINZ board member, contrasted the early days of the velvet industry – before most of his audience were born – with today’s market.

While velvet might have hit \$300/kg for a spell in the early days, total production was then only about 50 tonnes, he said. Since then, production (now over 1,000 tonnes) and the product had

changed a lot. There was now far more regrowth than before, and Super A grade had jumped from about 6 percent of all velvet 20 years ago, to 45 percent now.

The shift from a wholesale market to velvet as an ingredient in high-value food products was continuing, with more than 100 branded products in Korea alone. Korea Ginseng Corporation had just launched two new products with velvet, one for women and one for seniors, he said.

Korea, which directly or indirectly took about 60 percent of our velvet, is an innovative and sophisticated market, he said. China has no New Zealand-branded velvet products yet, and the market is “hard to crack”, but the China Deer Velvet Coalition, which Cochrane chairs, is leading the efforts to change all that. Felix Shen, employed by the coalition in China is doing the rounds of the big healthy food companies to try and replicate what’s being achieved in Korea, and get them on board with New Zealand velvet.

He said New Zealand is by far the world’s biggest velvet producer and China is second with 300–400 tonnes a year. Their Sika velvet fetches about three times the price of ours, however.

“We need to innovate to maintain value,” he concluded.



Tony Cochrane said we need to keep innovating in the velvet market.

continued on page 26

sheep and deer are finished on the property.

The “livestock” also include 85 beehives and, being Marlborough, there is a 17 hectare vineyard, bought in 2020.

The deer unit was started by his father Euan in 1998 when Jason (aged 19 at the time) and his brother Sam came to work on the farm. The brothers owned half of the 300 hinds that were share farmed with Euan for venison production.

Jason says the deer unit has steadily grown since then, with the addition of 147 hectares of unfenced neighbouring land by he and Sam in 2002. In 2010 the brothers bought into Wye Hills and merged the 147 hectares and share farmed deer into the main farm.

Fifty four hectares of irrigation was installed and specialist seed crops grown on that area.

Sam made a career change in 2015 and Jason started a transition out of the seed crops into more deer, with the starting up of a velvet herd. Jason says the deer expansion is ongoing with 223 hectares currently fenced and a further 39 hectares to be added in the next 12 months. Because the summer dry doesn’t suit lactating hinds, the balance in the deer is being tipped away from breeding and more to velvet production.

Although he’s been expanding the deer side of the operation, Jason says overall deer numbers in Marlborough have been declining as grapes take over more land.

He’s been involved in the Marlborough DFA committee since 2018 and was also on the Tbfree committee for two years before becoming chair last year. ■



New deer fencing is going in at Wye Hills.

Next Generation: continued



Andrew and Pam Peters (photo: Janet Gregory).

South to Taihape

On day two of the programme the group headed south the Taihape and two neighbouring deer farms that share similar rugged topography but quite different systems.

Balquidder

Pam and Andrew Peters have farmed this 430-hectare steep property for the past 30 years, and are mainstay breeders of venison weaners, also running a velvetting herd. They have 550 breeding hinds, 100 replacements and 140 stags, along with 1,400 ewes, 350 hoggets and 110 R2 steers. It's steep and high (up to 750 metres) and gets occasional snowfalls on higher ground. There are only three flat paddocks but they do some cropping and make baleage in spring when pastures take off. Andrew said it's hard feeding out baleage in winter because the ground is so slippery. The only bought-in supplement is a bit of maize.

The preferred pasture is a "fruit salad" including some ryegrass, cocksfoot (persistent in drought), fescue, white and red clover, plantain and chicory. Weaners turn up their noses at plantain but other stock like it.

The couple have created an attractive three acres of garden and their love of growing nice things is evident across the whole farm. They have planted extensively and thoughtfully, providing shade and shelter as well as helping stabilise soils, something that quickly became a priority following an extremely wet winter the year they arrived. "Some farms were 50 percent slips."

Andrew said apart from conservation, they were also motivated by the aesthetics of a nicely planted hillside, especially in spring and autumn. They won't plant more pines, or eucalyts or willows – "all they do is break fences" – but they are now focusing more on natives.

The value of shade couldn't be underestimated, with deer heading for shelter under the trees by 9am in summer.

"We've lost heaps of trees to frost in gullies so you have to choose the right trees. Now with natives we tend to start with something like manuka."

The main exotic species used are Veronese and Shinsei poplars. The couple were last year recognised for their environmental work with the NZ Landcare Trust Award for excellence in sustainable deer farming through action on the ground. Andrew said a lot of the work they'd done was well in advance of the current tide of regulations.

They've retired a 16-hectare block for native regeneration and set up a Horizons Farm Plan six years ago. They're recently joined the Rangitikei River Catchment Collective and Andrew chairs the Taihape Pukenua catchment group. They are gradually adding reticulated water across the farm for stock and do regular water quality testing.



Next Generation participants enjoying the slog uphill to see the great views from the top of Balquidder.

"All the natural water was an attraction when we bought the place. Now we have to fence it off, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. It also pays off if you're stopping a few cattle from falling into a gorge."

Pine trees, he said, were "a shit of a tree" but very good at pumping water. This had been useful for helping stabilise a big, slow-moving slump nearby. Their understanding of deer and the landscape helped persuade them to fence off and plant a sunny slope. "The deer would have wrecked it."

Protecting newly planted trees was a challenge once a poplar pole had burst out of its protector. Stags were the main destroyers.

It's a steep property and Andrew led the slightly subdued group (it had been a good night previously) on a bracing walk up to the top of the farm for spectacular views of the property and surrounds.

He assured the group that he'd always enjoyed disseminating his knowledge to young people, and kept to his word. Deer farming probably wasn't as much fun as it was in the early days of the industry, albeit probably safer now.

Andrew said they had taken a "massive hit" with Covid's impact on the schedule. "It cost us 20 percent of our income so that put back our environmental work."

The velvet side, however, had been "great".

Before they left Balquidder for the next farm visit, the Next Generation contingent was treated to another sumptuous lunch in the woolshed, this time sponsored by **Duncan NZ Venison and Ravensdown**.



They prefer a good "fruit salad" pasture at Balquidder.



Pam and Andrew Peters' extensive planting at Balquidder has done much to protect and enhance the landscape while providing a better environment for the deer.

Ruapehu Red Deer

Veterinarian and stud breeder **Paul Hughes** hosted the final stop of the programme at his nearby 180-hectare property on the northern edge of Taihape.



This year's sale stags at Ruapehu Red Deer Stud.

The stud was established in 2009 but the herd's history goes back much further to the 1980s. Sales during the 1990s were private treaty and in 2000 Hughes started selling at the Waiouru selling complex in collaboration with the Bruce family. He's been selling on-farm at his own auction facility since 2009. He currently runs 640 stud hinds and 36 2yr sale stags, but has just bought a block across the road and hopes to build up to nearly 1,000 hinds.

Significant inputs include Maral deer, known for their big frames and great temperament. Other sources include Peter Fraser's Furzeland genetics, Easterns from Canterbury Imported Red Deer Stud, and AI sires from Melior and Wilkins Farming.

Hughes has been a staunch supporter of Deer Select since its inception in 2008 and the dedication to good recording has paid off with significant improvements in breeding values for weaning weights and weight at 12 months over the years. Temperament continues to be a strong motivator for selection, as well as sound velvet.

Hughes is a great user of data and he has crunched the numbers to demonstrate that the additional feed required to support a larger hind raising a larger fawn more than pays for itself. By his reckoning the extra feed would cost only 66c/kg of additional liveweight gained.

He said there was a bit of a conflict developing in the breeding of replacement hinds, with velvetters favouring small, efficient hinds and many venison breeders opting for bigger breeding hinds

that can quickly raise a bigger, meatier fawn.

He's aiming to breed good dual purpose sires that can breed good replacements while also having the genetic heft to sire good fast-growing finishers.

Just like Balquidder up the road, pastures go gangbusters in spring, and Hughes uses sheep, cattle and deer to manage the surplus. Unlike his neighbours, however, Hughes prefers a very simple tetraploid ryegrass/clover pasture that's admirably weed free. (The fact that both systems work well shows that your farm system doesn't have to be entirely dictated by your environment.)

Hughes weans in the first week of March, straight onto kale with a bit of baleage. They have some maize before and after weaning to help with the transition. While the weaners experience a bit of a growth check at the time, it still pays off in the end and they are fine after about a week. Lack of parasites on crop is another advantage. Weaners are drenched at weaning, at weighing in mid winter and once in spring.

Interestingly they do not vaccinate for leptospirosis or yersiniosis. "We've never had those here." Because they use AI, dates are known, so scanning isn't used much. Conception rates for the AI'd hinds are usually 63 percent. Only a few sire stags are kept. "I don't like running a lot of stags – they can be pretty destructive."

Matching the pasture curve for the district is challenging. Hughes said pasture growth bottoms out at 12kgDM/ha in mid winter (demand averages 19.5kg at this time) and peaks at 55kg in early summer (demand is 42kg).

"It's all about grass," he said. "The art is in managing the spring surplus, which can be problematic for deer farming." Surplus is controlled by deer, cattle and sheep. "We try and present quality feed to the stock, year round."

He uses a strategic application of nitrogen in late December/early January. "We don't skimp on fertiliser. You've got a lot of money tied up in your land so you don't want it underperforming." ■



Paul Hughes: It's all about the grass.

Bob Swann honoured on the occasion of his 90th birthday

There was a very special 90th birthday celebration for industry pioneer Bob Swann on 20 August when family and Bob's many friends from across the industry gathered in Fairlie to mark the occasion. And the icing on this particular birthday cake was the presentation to Bob of the Matuschka Award*, something he's been judging himself since the award started. It's hard to think of a more deserving recipient.

THESE ARE SOME of the comments from Bob's friends near and far at the celebration.

From Murray Matuschka

"Barbara and I met Bob and Francis at a conference in Te Anau way back in 1978. We had an instant connection that lasted 44 years.

"Here at *Kitenui* we had the first velvet removal demonstration. A huge crowd turned up. I had vets from all around the North Island to show us. But Bob knew more, so they all stood back with us and watched the home-grown skill and care.

"Bob had one of the best stags in New Zealand at that time, *Big Dad*. Bob, I still say my *Major* was better!

"Bob Swann must be now recognised as the enduring and much respected father of our deer industry. He is an icon to all people who know him and those who don't. Bob, you are the brother I never had."

From Justin Stevens, NZDFA

"Congratulations on achieving such a fantastic milestone! The NZDFA owes you and many other forward-thinking deer farmers a great debt of gratitude for the wonderful industry that we are now part of. I read with great envy about the exciting times that you had in the early years of a new industry, with the highs, lows and everything in between. You faced the challenges head on, overcame them and kept going no matter what."



Bob Swann with the Matuschka Award – one he's been judging himself since its inception. Photo: Peter Swann



Bob at his birthday celebration with older sister Francie (left) and old school friend Jessie Keown (right). Photo: Peter Swann

From Tony Pearse, former producer manager

"Bob Swann's depth of knowledge of deer and his vision for the future especially around velvet antler has been a cornerstone of the industry. That led to the awarding of a very early life membership of the NZDFA and he has remained integral to the DFA over his entire period.

"Bob's advice and commentary have never been mixed with the flowery words and wandering explanations you might have heard from us at Invermay, or the DFA branches and industry groups.

"Bob must surely hold the record for deer industry events attended. He has his own classic style for sound but cryptic commentary on the application of research, how deer behave and how practical management is really just good farming common sense.

"Every year since the inception of the Matuschka Award in 1996, Bob and Murray have been the two chief judges and I joined them in in early 2000s.

"That annual pre-conference discussion with those two was always a highlight, where short, concise commentary, strong opinion and a considered outcome would be delivered. All of the winners since 1996 and their branches have enjoyed the award and the subsequent branch celebration." ■

* The Matuschka Award recognises "the grass roots farmer and unsung contributor to local area activities, functions and core spirit of deer farming". The award is presented at a special mid-winter function in the recipient's branch.

Future for local deer cartage business secured

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Pip Rutland didn't really have a succession plan for his deer cartage business, so when he was getting set to retire from it, his two dozen or so local clients faced more limited options for shifting their animals. He was delighted, then, when friends Malcolm and Caroline Rau stepped in to buy the cartage business and keep it running to continue a valuable local service.



Pip Rutland with his truck prior to passing on the business to the Raus.

PIP, AND WIFE Giselle, have been deer farming identities in the East Coast region for decades. They were recognised in 2010 with a richly deserved Matuschka award for their dedication to the industry and willingness to offer help and advice to others. Pip served as NZDFA Poverty Bay branch chair for about 12 years and is also an active member of the Deer QA transport technical committee, advising on deer transport standards for the past 25 years.

Their retirement from the deer cartage business was marked at a special event on 24 August at the Bushmere Arms near Gisborne. About fifty people including many deer farming colleagues from the early days such as Peter Adlam, and Warwick and Marg Kent made the trip to join the Rutlands. As well as sharing a few good stories from the early days, the Rutlands were treated to a helicopter tour of some of Pip's old deer hunting and trapping haunts. They were joined on the flight by friends Buster Taylor, Cecil Brown and Laurence Rau – all names synonymous with the pioneering days of the industry on the East Coast.

In a message for Pip at the retirement function, former DINZ QA manager John Tacon (himself recently retired) said "Pip's knowledge and understanding of all things deer and deer transport has had many in awe of him. His quiet, unassuming demeanour meant that he fitted into and was respected in any forum."

Tony Pearse (also recently retired!) added his message, that "the Rutlands are the embodiment of community spirit and have faithfully been involved in all aspects of the deer industry and

DFA over the past 40 years. Their clients always got more than just a pickup or delivery. They were greeted as an integral part of the industry, certain their stock were in the care of a professional whose mana and ethics extended to the deer, the people and the task ahead."

Like many in deer farming, Pip's association started with hunting as a teenager, then moving on to trapping, shooting and live capture from helicopters throughout the 1980s before he and Giselle bought their farm at Ormond, near Gisborne. They set up the deer cartage business soon after. Today they are still running about 200 velvetting stags.

Malcolm and Caroline Rau have rebranded the cartage business Malcolm Rau Deer Cartage, and hit the ground running when they took over the operation in late July. "When we heard Pip was retiring we thought it would be crazy not to pick up the business and keep it going so that we and the others would still have access to a good local service," Caroline says. "We were told to expect about one load every 10 days but we've got three loads booked for next week alone – that's awesome!"

The Raus are at Matawai, about 90 minutes inland from Gisborne. They run one-third each sheep, cattle and deer, running a velvetting herd and breeding their own replacements. ■



Keeping on trucking: Malcolm and Caroline Rau with the rebranded Nissan.

Obituary: Philip Irwin

6 September 1941 – 9 September 2022

The Queen of the Commonwealth died on the same day as a King of the Velvet Competition. Philip Irwin died on 9 September, just three days after his 81st birthday.

BORN AND EDUCATED in Browns, Southland, then shifting with the family to farm in Wairarapa, Philip Irwin started with Wright Stephenson as a livestock agent in 1969.

In 1978 he transferred to Nelson as a livestock manager where he changed to a deer (and goat) agent in 1980 before moving to Hawke's Bay in 1984 as a venison procurement agent for Challenge Venison until the Venison NZ Co-op days.

In 1982 Philip was involved in setting up the first velvet pool tender sales with David Ward and Russell Black. In 1988 Wrightson merged with Dalgety's and Philip became the national velvet manager based in Hawke's Bay until the PGG and Wrightson merger in 2006.

In 1992 Wrightson Velvet developed a computerised system for selling velvet, named Vellum with Philip's involvement alongside Wayne McCausland. He loved interacting with people and gadgets so was pivotal in establishing the North Island Velvet Competition



Philip Irwin, seated at centre, at the launch of computerised electronic trading for velvet in 1992. (Also pictured in back row from left Collier Isaacs, Peter Campbell and Russell Henderson; front right Bob Bennett.)

and online scoring system that has been passed onto the NIVC and helped form the National Velvet Competitions system.

Philip was also heavily involved in refining the NZ Grading Guidelines throughout his time. He made many trips to Asia and throughout New Zealand at the drop of a hat and was always keen to become involved, lend a hand and get to know people from all walks, not just deer.

After retiring, Philip moved to Deer Improvement as an agent before going on the road for Federated Farmers. Aside deer and velvet, Philip's other real passion was rugby, and after concussion at a young age he moved into refereeing throughout his entire working career in both Wairarapa and Hawke's Bay.

As a very active Hawke's Bay DFA member, Philip was only the second person to be awarded life membership of the branch. However his most proud moment came in 2013, when he was presented the prestigious Matuschka Award for his grass roots work behind the scenes within his branch.

Philip will be remembered for his caring and friendly approach to train, help, and work alongside people. He had a lifetime of generous involvement in so many different areas and organisations – too many to list here. The large number of deer farmers and industry people attending Philip's funeral was a mark of the respect he earned over the years and Grant Charteris gave Philip a fitting speech in tribute from our industry.

RIP Philip – you have earned it. ■
– contributed by Tony Cochrane



Philip Irwin with the Matuschka Award, 2013.

Sticky Asian glazed venison meatballs

Try this fresh.co.nz delicious dish to roll you into spring/summer. It's perfect for a mid-week dinner and guaranteed to please the whole family – these venison meatballs with sticky Asian glaze are easy to prepare, yet full of flavour!

Ingredients

Meatballs

- 500 g farm-raised venison mince
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 1 tbsp premium soy sauce
- ½ cup panko breadcrumbs
- 1 free range egg
- 1 tbsp ginger roughly chopped
- 2 garlic cloves roughly chopped

Sticky sauce

- ½ jar Hoisin sauce
- 1 tsp sesame oil
- 1 tbsp premium soy sauce
- 2 tbsp rice wine vinegar (or use white wine or apple cider vinegar)
- 1 tbsp ginger roughly chopped
- 2 garlic cloves roughly chopped



To serve

- 2 pouches Ben's Original Poké Bowl Asian inspired Soy and Ginger Microwave Rice
- 2 heads Shanghai pak choy halved or quartered and steamed
- 1 spring onion finely sliced

Method

1. Bring venison to room temperature.
2. Preheat oven to 200°C.
3. Line a baking tray with baking paper and set aside.
4. **For the meatballs:** Combine all meatball ingredients and mix

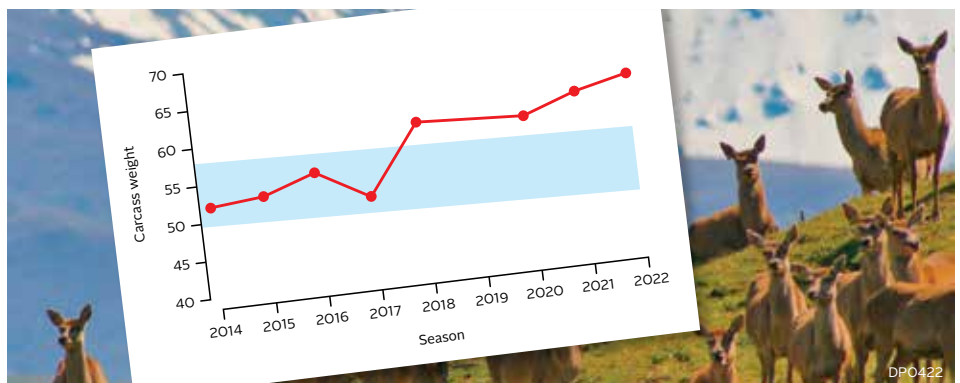
well. Add the venison mince and break up with a wooden spoon. Make sure to work the mixture well so the mince is well coated and the meatballs keep their shape. Roll the mixture into 3cm balls and place on the baking tray. Bake for 15 minutes or until fully cooked. Set aside.

5. **For the sticky sauce:** In a medium saucepan, whisk the sauce ingredients together and bring to a gentle boil, stirring constantly. Boil for another minute and remove from the heat.
 6. Add the meatballs to the sauce and coat well. Serve immediately with warm rice, pak choy and sprinkle with spring onion to finish.
- Watch how to make it at: <https://youtu.be/GSdlQxHczol>
 - For more venison recipes: www.fresh.co.nz ■

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