

Deer Industry News

Facing fifty:
Invermay celebrates
half century in deer



Game Season Recap
FULL STEAM AHEAD FOR
GAME SEASON IN EUROPE
BUT COST OF LIVING
CONCERNS LINGER

Elworthy Award
DR LEE AND FILM CREW
COME TO FOREST ROAD
FARM TO CELEBRATE
PREMIER AWARD WIN

Maximising Venison
THREE FARMS SHOW
HOW TERMINAL SIRES FIT
THEIR SYSTEM AND BOOST
CARCASS WEIGHTS



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Deer Industry News

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Cover: Young stock on the flats at AgResearch Invermay nervously check out the more than 100 guests who came to celebrate 50 years of deer research. See p30. Photo: Phil Stewart.

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So long and thanks for all the venison

This issue of *Deer Industry News* will be my last as editor. I first took over a modest DFA newsletter, *Stagline*, in 1994. That got a make-over in 1996 with the introduction of the commodity levy and continued for 37 issues until 2002, when DINZ was established.



DEER INDUSTRY NEWS was launched in October 2002 as a joint publication of DFA and DINZ and this its 116th edition.

It's time someone else had a go, and I'm happy to announce that Lynda Gray will be stepping into the role from the next issue, in March 2023.

Lynda is well known in the industry (see more on page 32). She's written extensively on deer through *Countrywide* and has contributed to this title. She's also recently published *In Hindsight*, marking 50 years of deer farming.

I'll continue to write for *Deer Industry News*, but Lynda will be steering the ship from next year.

There are a lot of people to thank.

First, thank you Ali Spencer, my agricultural journalist colleague who writes so knowledgably and diligently about the post-farmgate part of the industry, first in the old *Market Report* newsletter and then in this magazine. We've been a great team.

Second, my thanks to the advertisers who have supported the magazine so loyally, even during the tough times. Your input has meant we could punch above our weight for a small industry publication and provide the coverage readers deserve.

Third, thank you to all the people who have agreed to be interviewed or contribute articles, my other ag journo colleague Trev Walton included. We can't do it all ourselves and your input has given the magazine a stamp of authority.

Fourth, my thanks to the people who make sure the magazine gets to you: the designers, printers, Pam MacLeman at DINZ, and the mail house. You put up with my deadline demands, make sure it looks good and get it out on time.

Fifth, a shoutout to the DFA and DINZ staff I've worked with. You've been helpful and patient with your time and advice. I haven't seen out quite as many CEOs as the Queen did Prime Ministers, but I have worked with four great chief executives: MJ Loza, Mark O'Connor, Dan Coup and Innes Moffat. You've all shown a lot of trust and given me plenty of latitude when it comes to what we put in the magazine. Freedom of the press is alive and well in this corner of the media!

Finally, my thanks to you, the readers. Our surveys show you still like the magazine and that's not taken for granted. You've welcomed me onto your farms and businesses and reporting on your achievements has been a huge privilege. You're a unique bunch of people – generous, funny, knowledgeable and very happy to share your stories with us. You probably don't look a lot like the animals you farm, but I suspect a lot of their character and unique charm has rubbed off on you.

Change is good and healthy, and I wish Lynda all the best for next year as she picks up this fine publication and runs with it. ■

– Phil Stewart – Editor, *Deer Industry News*

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Full steam ahead for European game season

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

It's been full steam ahead for venison exporters and DINZ in Europe. Part-way through the game season, all were busy. While there's good demand and confidence for venison, they say, European consumers' cost-of-living concerns could affect red meat generally in 2023 – a potential "judder bar" to be navigated.

SILVER FERN FARMS' general manager sales Peter Robinson returned from an October market visit, which included attendance at the giant food trade show, SIAL, in Paris.

He found trade sentiment was generally more negative than it was during an earlier trip in May. Energy prices, inflation, cost-of-living and the Ukraine war will probably weigh heavily on European importers' minds in the first half of 2023. "We're going to see a fair bit of caution out of European importers of all red meats," he predicts.

"We're mindful that these many challenges will affect consumers' income. It will be a case of us navigating through that changed environment."

However, with a couple of years of reasonably good results for venison, and "good outcomes in rebuilding the category," Silver Fern Farms has more confidence in venison's future, he says.

"This is a potential judder bar, and we will work hard to navigate around it."

While venison sits in a niche area for higher-end consumers and has not been affected as much as lamb or beef, he cautions that the situation can flow over to any meat.

That said, he is confident the venison category will "hold its ground this time," compared to a downturn for beef or lamb if restaurants should start to be affected, as they were during Covid.

Progress after hesitant start

This assessment was echoed by Alliance sales manager Katrina Allan, who reports that after a hesitant start, European sales are now progressing well for the co-operative.

Alliance's foodservice items such as striploins, tenderloins and racks, particularly, are in high demand.

"New Zealand venison's end-user is generally more affluent and not so affected by the increase in the cost of living," she says. "This consumer tends to dine out and request venison."

Production seems generally to have been steady. Robinson reports good take-up for Silver Fern Farms with chilled production "slightly up on last year", steady management of inventory and the "amount shipped matching sales".

Poor grass growth in parts of the country meant a slower start to the season for Duncan NZ, but numbers are now picking up with both plants running at close to full capacity, reports marketing manager Chris Duncan. He has just returned from Europe visiting key customers.

Similarly, Mountain River Venison (MRV), which mainly

services its North American and Scandinavian markets with frozen venison, was also running about two to three weeks behind its usual peak, but was in full production again at the time of writing.

Contract farmgate prices being paid for chilled venison by processors this year were around the \$9.30-\$9.60/kg mark.

Marketing director John Sadler reported good demand in a "very different season". There was more positivity, "but so many risks," he noted.

One of those, shipping, was slightly improved, but remains an issue for all exporters. Freight rates are still high and smaller delays are still common, though more ships and containers are becoming available for the Pacific as the East-West trade slows in tune with China's downturn. More air routes are opening too, as the world regains some normality and tourists start moving around.

MRV has found shipments are being commonly delayed by about 10 days, while Duncan reports better container availability and "more favourable sailing times than they were several months ago".

"That said, shipping remains a challenging aspect of the business, which requires careful planning and constant attention," Duncan notes.

Robinson felt, however, there was "light at the end of the tunnel".

At the time of writing, all of Alliance's sea deliveries with longer transits to Europe had been completed, "so now customers are backing up their orders with air deliveries," Allan reports.

Chilled meat has been less available in Europe this year with the co-operative's customers using frozen to supplement the chilled, she says. "This allows the frozen stocks to continue to move steadily and fill the gaps."

The chilled shipment window had been reduced by one to two weeks, as reliability of the supply chain continued to be an issue, she noted.

"Margins are then squeezed when air freight becomes the only option to have product delivered in time for the game season," she says.

DINZ hard at work supporting venison companies

Another recently returned from Europe, in his first market visit since the pandemic, was DINZ venison marketing manager Nick Taylor.



Shannon Campbell, hard at work in one of the seven Sligro stores in the Netherlands showcasing New Zealand venison in November/December. He worked with Luiten Foods and Silver Fern Farms on in-store demonstrations, which aimed to raise awareness of venison with customers. This involved three demonstrations a day, including sampling, print and online advertising and specials for different cuts, “currently for the rack,” Campbell reports.

“It was great to meet with the importers, to see some of the fantastic new products hitting the market, and talk about the promotional opportunities and how DINZ can support this,” he says.

He was particularly pleased to see how many of the companies are using DINZ consultant chef Shannon Campbell for promotional activities.

“Shannon has over 30 days of promotional activities planned in November and December and has had to call on another Kiwi chef to support him. It has been great to get involved with new companies who we haven’t worked with before.”

He echoed exporters’ concerns about the increased costs that consumers are facing.

“Unlike Covid, our high-end restaurant clients are somewhat insulated from these increasing costs, but retail products are potentially vulnerable to this with consumers tightening their belts.”

Campbell, who is based in Germany, says now that the EU has 95 percent gas storage in place, “some of the panic around gas prices has dissipated, in part also thanks to a late start to winter”.

Consumer sentiment is still cautious, but trade is brisk albeit not as busy as it could be.

It’s a “very similar attitude to when we had the crash in 2008,” he feels.

Taylor’s conversations with importers suggest that despite the economic outlook, they see the long-term outlook for venison as positive.



Mikael Granberg and Gustaf Kugelberg, MRV Scandinavia, in front of the in-store promotional material.

The lack of game products available this year, because of African Swine Fever and avian flu, creates challenges for those industries, but potential opportunities for farm-raised grass-fed New Zealand venison, he believes.

A personal highlight for Taylor was seeing the new retail items that Mountain River had launched in Scandinavia with support from the Marketing Innovation Fund last year.

“The range of chilled items complements the frozen retail items available at the supermarket, giving venison a bigger overall footprint. In addition, large in-store promotions tell our natural farming story, giving consumers confidence in the product.”

Campbell also helped MRV with a presentation for distributor Menigo, which was well attended by local restaurants in the Uppsala area. “It went very well,” he reports. “We presented new recipe ideas and talked about costings and getting added value out of the cuts.”

With a diversified product range, Mountain River continues to reap the benefits of its promotion efforts. “There is very good brand presentation,” he said.

Customers told Taylor it was important to keep targeting young up-and-coming chefs, exposing them to the product early in their career.

“Using digital channels such as Instagram is critical. Chefs are generally visual people, and this is where they look for



Mountain River Venison’s new attractively packaged Scandinavian retail items are now on the shelf.

inspiration,” says Taylor. DINZ will keep developing digital content to target this audience.

Here’s a taste of some of the many promotional activities that have been underway this year.

Targeting affluent German consumers

Affluent consumers were the target of Silver Fern Farms’ activity in Germany during the game season.

Advertorials about grass-fed New Zealand venison appeared in two key German magazines: the September edition of upscale hotel magazine *First Class* and the autumn issue of a specialist journal for gourmets, *Oyster*. They have a combined circulation of around 34,000.

continued on page 6

Game season: continued



A four-page advertorial ran in *Oyster Magazine*, a specialist journal circulating to 20,000 passionate German gourmets.

“They focused on the ability for animals to graze New Zealand’s lush green pastures year-round and the nutritional benefits of our wonderful venison products, along with our sustainability journey,” explains Becks Stratton, Silver Fern Farms’ marketing manager for global service.

“Huge” Fine Food Days for Silver Fern Farms

The other major event for Silver Fern Farms has been its premium partnership with Fine Food Days in Cologne, Germany (see *Deer Industry News*, October/November 2022, p18). This was supported by DINZ with plenty of activity from consultant chef Shannon Campbell.

“Our venison was showcased for three weeks in front of this key



Shannon Campbell (centre) with his helpers at the Silver Fern Farms venison stand at the opening event for Fine Food Days.

audience,” says Stratton, adding that it was a “huge” event for the team.

A key focus for the whole event was sustainability, “which made it even more fitting for Silver Fern Farms”.

Silver Fern Farms venison was included in the menus for two exclusive events organised during the festival. “This connected us with star chefs, journalists, food bloggers and gourmets,” she says.



Guests queuing for the exclusive Kitchen Party Deluxe event at Fine Food Days.

continued on page 8

Yersiniavax® – 30 yrs reducing weaner losses

YERSINIA IS STILL the leading cause of death in fawns during autumn and winter. Weaners are most at risk, usually becoming infected at 4–8 months of age by eating or drinking faecally contaminated material. Important stressors include weaning, poor nutrition, sudden change in feed, mixing of deer groups, bad weather, yarding, transport, concurrent diseases and heavy parasite burdens.

Since its launch in 1993, Yersiniavax® remains the only vaccine specifically developed for farmed deer. It took about five years to develop, including preliminary studies identifying strains, carriers, and infection profiles in weaner deer. This work confirmed that virtually all weaners get exposure some time in their first autumn /winter.

Colin Mackintosh of AgResearch Invermay, once gave a fantastic tongue-in-cheek presentation: “*Yersiniavax – a recipe for disaster*” where he spelled out how to ensure the vaccine does **not** perform as it should. Advice included:

- Don’t read the instructions
- Leave the vaccine in the truck, preferably in full sun, for a few days before using
- After the first dose, leave the vaccine lying around in the shed (preferably in the sun) for a few weeks before giving the booster shot!
- Don’t wash out the vaccinating gun or check that it is delivering the right dose; use an old dirty one!

- Reuse old, blunt and dirty needles!
 - Vaccinate wet animals!
 - Ensure all animals are highly stressed before vaccination! (Round them up lots)
 - Combine Yersiniavax vaccination with weaning, tagging, weighing, other vaccinations and as many other treatments as you can think of, the more the better!
 - Don’t bother with a second dose, or at least wait until after an outbreak of yersiniosis has started before giving it!
- Obviously, these actions are really ones to **AVOID**. To ensure a good result from using Yersiniavax, start by reading the instructions carefully and then follow them accurately. All weaners will be exposed to this deadly bacterium and using the vaccine correctly will ensure losses are greatly reduced.

Vaccination enhances, rather than substitutes for, good management and will help prevent a serious epidemic by reducing the spread of disease through a mob. Two doses of Yersiniavax, 3–6 weeks apart, are required to stimulate immunity. The first dose should be from 3 months of age to maximise the programme’s effectiveness.

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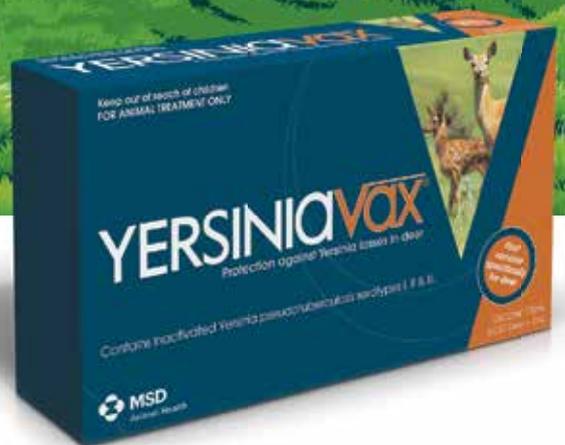
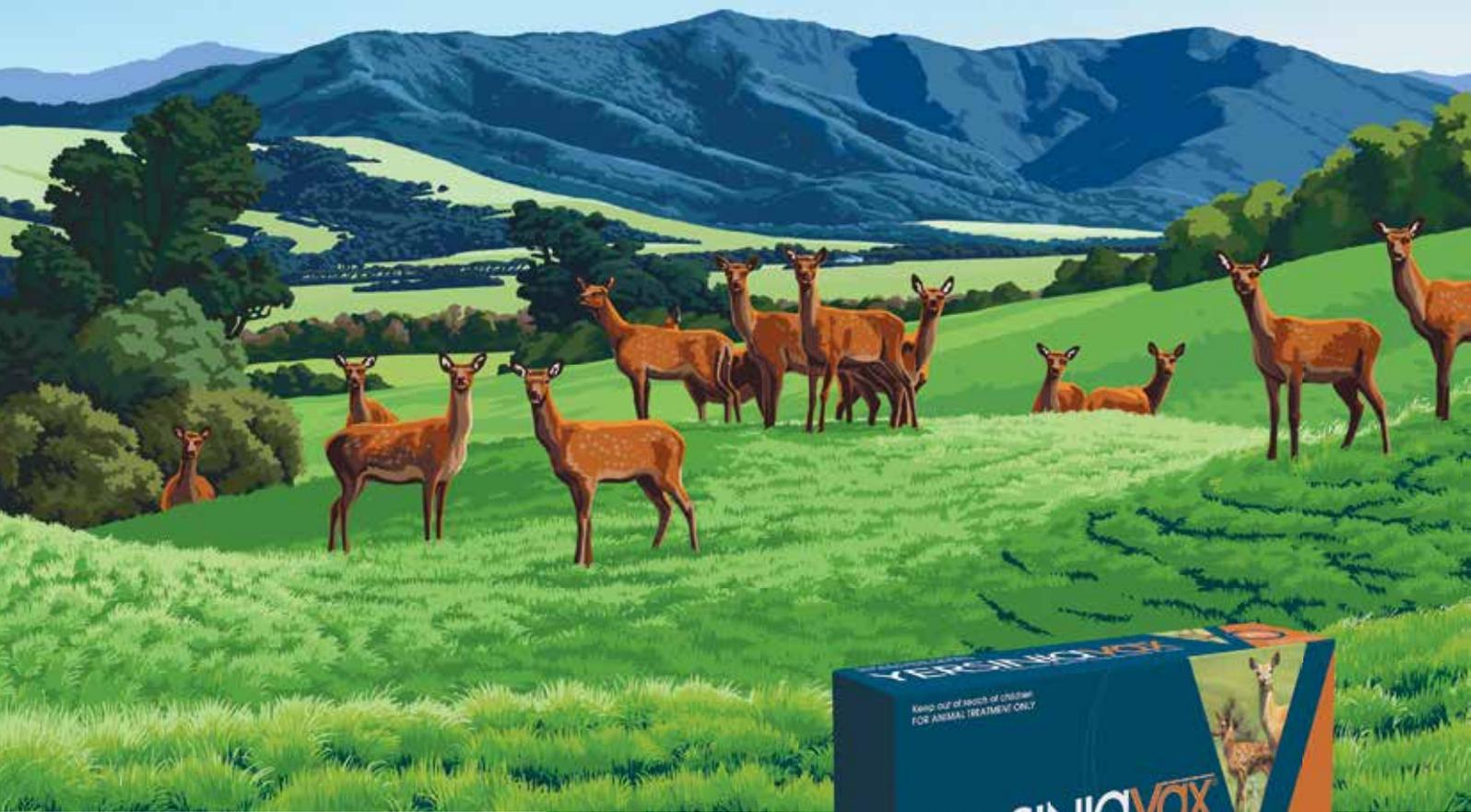


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Game season: continued

“Our product also featured at the flagship events, with Silver Fern Farms venison loin being served at the grand opening and closing gala.”

Stratton reports a great reception from organisers and chefs. Two restaurants have already requested exclusive Silver Fern Farms events next year and the team has been invited to be involved in the strategic direction of Fine Food Days 2023.

An article on Fine Food Days has since appeared on *First Class* magazine’s website – <http://bit.ly/3gc4WTD> – and will be sign-posted from its next subscribers’ newsletter.



Chefs could buy New Zealand venison directly at Citti from this sales stand.

Benelux

In addition to Sligro (see photo page 5), Campbell helped with two other events in the Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg (Benelux) region.

He is working with Silver Fern Farms and supported wholesaler Citti in its in-store tasting programmes in the region.

Planned activity includes in-store sales stands accompanied by print and online advertising, mini in-house fairs, experience evenings with invited gastronomy guests and direct marketing to Chefs Culinar customers through Citti’s advertising channels from October to December.

“We also took part in a Kitchen Party with their development chef at Landgasthaus Westrich, on the Netherlands/Germany border, with local chefs and restaurants,” says Campbell.

Working with Alliance importer Bimpex, he was involved in two “very well-attended” open-store evening events at Carmens, a wholesaler outside of Antwerp in Belgium in October. New Zealand venison presented four courses at two separate seminars on each of the evenings, giving an overview of New Zealand venison’s versatility and quality, Campbell reports.



The boxes were packed with venison and barbecue products.

BBQ Britain

Ten Pure South venison barbecue boxes were delivered to top chefs in the United Kingdom, around New Zealand venison BBQ week in early September.

The objective of the campaign, 50 percent supported by DINZ, was to “change the perception around venison solely being an autumn/seasonal product and to show its versatility during BBQ season,” explains Alliance regional marketing manager Gemma Baldwin.

“We wanted to get social media coverage using the #nzvenisonbbqday hashtags and raise awareness of the benefits of New Zealand venison.”

The boxes included a range of Pure South venison boneless shoulder and venison and hidden veg burgers, marinades, rubs and smoking wood chips, plus wine.

Delighted recipients included well-known chefs like Kerth Gumbs (*Great British Menu* and now co-host of *Masterchef Juniors*), Cyrus Todiwala OBE and John Skotidas, who showed their creations on Instagram. Together, their social media reach was over 80,000.

The co-operative has also been introducing its new Handpicked Venison offer to Sainsbury’s Meat, Fish & Poultry Innovation and new product developments teams via a chefs’ table. The exercise will be repeated for its Tesco buyers.

Alliance was also busy earlier in the year, as it was the official red meat sponsor of the New Zealand Olympic Committee for the



Alliance was bringing the flavour of New Zealand venison to our own athletes during this year’s Commonwealth Games.

2022 Commonwealth Games at the end of July–early August.

Baldwin reports they fed the 233 New Zealand athletes and their entourages, plus New Zealand VIPs and delegates, who were all centred at the Edgbaston Golf Club for the Games. The Alliance and Pure South venison products – burgers, ragu and pies – demonstrated the co-operative’s innovative product development on the daily menus and were also on show at five VIP events.

“Our branding was at all events and on menus, raising our profile and reinforcing our position as a premium, nutritious New Zealand red meat supplier for world-renowned athletes,” she reports.

The sponsorship has opened up opportunities for the upcoming Paris 2024 Olympic Games, “which is incredibly exciting and an opportunity to showcase our products on an even bigger stage,” she says.

Michelin-starred guests and trade fair in Italy

Seventy of Rome's leading restaurateurs, chefs and sommeliers, were treated to Pure South Venison prosciutto and venison tartare at an upmarket NZTE-organised event in June.

Pure South venison racks were being provided by Alliance for a very special chefs' table in late November – including 10 of Italy's Michelin-starred and fine-dining chefs.

The menu was to be prepared by Felix Lo Basso, himself the recipient of a Michelin star.



New Zealand venison getting plated up at the Daniele Lippi event in June.



Pure South carpaccio of venison was served for the up-market guests in Rome.

At both events, Alliance had brand presence on menus and brand videos were played.

In addition, Silver Fern Farms used Shannon Campbell's skills to serve 500 portions at the well-visited Wörndle Gran Chef trade fair in Northern Italy in November.

"All the salespeople I spoke to were very enthusiastic about New Zealand venison and its quality," reports Campbell, adding there was a "very high brand recognition" among the attending chefs. ■



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Unifying products' superpowers

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

A new aspirational way of telling the New Zealand deer product story, combining ingenuity, excellence, working in harmony with nature and nutritional value under the banner Nature's Superpower™ has been introduced by DINZ. The new story will be rolled out for different parts of the sector to use.

"IT'S NOT A brand. We have created the components of a consistent story for us all to tell," explains DINZ CEO Innes Moffat. Elements of the story can be applied in different markets and for different audiences with messages that may add to companies' own brands.

The project started with Moffat keen to get a unified story of why producing farmed deer products is a great way of using New Zealand's natural resources. He wanted to "create our own stories. Instead of saying venison is 'like this' or 'like that', we elevate our products with an aspirational shift in our storytelling, so they are valued as Nature's finest, naturally farmed," he says.

SHIFT TO STORYTELLING

From:		To:
Traded commodity	→	Premium desirability
Special occasion	→	Everyday luxury
Fragmented communications	→	United brand story
Compared with	→	Superior to
"It's a bit like..."	→	Proprietary language
Perceived as "gamey"	→	Valued as a superfood
New Zealand farmed	→	Nature's finest, naturally farmed
"Informing people"	→	Inspiring advocacy
Rational	→	Emotive

An aspirational shift in storytelling.

The DINZ team worked with professional designers and copywriters on the project. All were focused on the use of nature to produce luxury products that have great health-giving properties.

"When we use it in conversation, people totally get it. Venison is the best source of bioavailable iron and zinc, it's raised on natural pasture and tastes delicious. It's a superpower protein," says Moffat.

"The 'superpower' tag came from superfood and then one phrase relating to velvet that Rhys Griffiths, DINZ manager markets, really liked: 'The antidote to average'.

"It changes the whole tone of voice and language around this industry," he says.

The narrative is built on five blocks: the ingenuity of the sector's pioneers; farming in harmony with nature; the superior health and nutritional benefits of venison and therapeutic potency of velvet; the integrity of New Zealand's deer systems; and the luxury and quality of the products.

From Nature's Superpower™, which tells the whole sector's story, product-specific propositions have been developed for venison (Nature's Superpower Protein™) and velvet (Nature's Superpower Supplement™). All share a strapline "Naturally farmed in New Zealand" and have been trademarked in New

Zealand and key markets.

The velvet proposition was tested again a few months ago with DINZ's Korean partners.

"They really liked it, engaged with it and have since localised it for the Korean

market," Griffiths reports. It had already been introduced to Korean trade media during his and Moffat's recent market visit.

Griffiths says he's proud of the work and "very keen to see what eventuates".

Nick Taylor, DINZ venison marketing manager says the venison elements can support the work of venison marketing companies. The text, imagery and facts on nutrition and farming systems are consistent for all deer product marketers and can be used to underpin companies' own venison brands, he says.

Deer farmers attending the DFA branch chairs' meeting in October welcomed the concept. These included Canterbury Deer Farmer Graham Peck and Peel Forest Estate farm manager Mark Tapley.

"It will be a great promotional tool to support the marketing of our products. Anything that promotes venison and velvet is great for the industry and, therefore, for my business," says Peck.

"We've got two exceptional products coming together under a single, memorable and ownable proposition," Moffat says.

Elements of the work will be incorporated into DINZ communications.

"We're going to be telling our story more regularly, both here in New Zealand and, as appropriate, in some markets around the world."

A new microsite www.naturesuperpower.com has been set up. ■



Specific product propositions can be drawn from Nature's Superpower™



Innes Moffat introducing the new New Zealand deer story to Korean trade journalists in October.

“Awesome to see” Korean velvet visitors coming to NZ

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Market visits from velvet customers are resuming as business starts to get back to some form of normality, post-Covid.



The winning KGC salespeople at Sheerwater with DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat, manager markets Rhys Griffiths and hosts Brian and Brigitte Richards.

“IT HAS BEEN awesome to see visits recently from two of our key Korean customers for New Zealand velvet to New Zealand for the first time since 2019,” says DINZ manager markets, Rhys Griffiths.

Eighteen of Korea Ginseng Corporation’s (KGC’s) sales staff – all winners in this year’s Chuseok sales promotion – travelled to New Zealand in early November to see New Zealand’s velvet production systems for themselves.

They followed Korean celebrity “deer doctor” Dr GyongJai Lee. As one of the category sponsors, he attended the Environmental Awards field day in early October held at Grant and Sally Charteris’ Forest Road Farm (see report on page 18).

The visits have alternated with the first New Zealand visitors heading up to the market since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic.

DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat and manager markets Rhys Griffiths were in the Republic of South Korea for seven days in late September.

Their meetings with key customers revealed good demand and more investment in the pipeline for new products and research both in healthy foods and Korean medicine. They also gave confidence that consumption of New Zealand velvet will continue to increase in the medium term.

“Working with companies investing in innovative food and Korean medicine products in South Korea, which consumes around 60 percent of New Zealand velvet, remains the right strategy,” Griffiths told the DFA branch chairs’ meeting in mid-October (see also report on page 37).

Among their many meetings in Korea, Moffat signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the CEO of HanPure, an innovative online service which was preparing and dispensing bespoke prescriptions from Korean medicine doctors (see page 36

for more on this). While in Korea, the New Zealand ambassador hosted a dinner at the New Zealand residence in Seoul for the CEO of Yuhan Care, a subsidiary of Korea’s largest pharmaceutical company.

“They are 10 percent of our business, have aspirations to get bigger and to grow rapidly into new innovative markets,” Griffiths reports.

However, their positive report from the Korean market was tempered by economic conditions in China and its continuing Covid lockdowns. This means business in China has slowed.

“They were simply not as engaged in the early part of the season,” says Griffiths. ■



Dr Lee brought a film crew and entourage with him and – after he had planted a kowhai tree on the property – was going back to Korea to promote the “New Zealandness” of his products, reports Rhys Griffiths.

Two minutes to impress

by Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

In less than two minutes, a piece on China Central Television brought New Zealand venison to the attention of over 65 million people.

A REPORTER FROM China’s most influential television channel stopped to try a sample of New Zealand venison at Silver Fern Farms’ stand at the Chinese government’s gigantic China International Import Expo (CIIE) show in Shanghai in early November.

“They tried and liked our venison for its distinctive flavour, freshness and tenderness, live on air in their ‘Delicious at CIIE’ segment,” reports Claire Tan, Silver Fern Farms head of global marketing China, who attended the event.

The segment was aired 13 times in the different news and business programmes and had a potential audience of more than 65 million.



Alex Wang, Silver Fern Farms country manager, participated in the China International Meat Conference, which ran alongside CIIE, where he again highlighted the venison launch.

This was the fifth time the six-day event had been held and Silver Fern Farms has had a presence at each one.

The company’s in-market partner Good Farmer decided to add venison into its retail range this year, after successful launches for beef two years ago and lamb last year.

The new retail-packaged venison range – including a venison French rack, two sizes of venison cubes, shanks, ribs and striploin – were

showcased for the first time in China in two booths on the New Zealand Pavilion and also on the corporate stand in the Food and Agricultural Products section of the show.

Tan was “super excited” by the launch, which was supported with DINZ co-funding. This had been held back from its planned timing in April by Covid lockdowns and then the Chinese summer period, which included school holidays.

A media warm-up campaign starting in October generated over



Silver Fern Farms grass-fed NZ venison rack has been added to the Good Farmers retail range.

continued on page 14

Excited about quality for 2023

BLACK FOREST PARK is a pioneer of the New Zealand deer scene and has been producing world-class, genetically superior European deer since 1980 when Trevor Currie, Richard’s father, established his first deer operation at their Outram farm.

Black Forest Park’s annual sale of sire stags is scheduled for 10 January 2023 on the farm at Woodside, Outram.

Owner Richard Currie is looking forward to next year’s sale, and while it is still early days in the selection process, he is excited with the quality of animals coming through and says there will be a very high quality of stags offered.

One of Black Forest Park’s Master Sires, Alonso scored a massive 934 inches this year. A son of his, Lot 2 in the 2022 sale (pictured), sold for \$70,000. Currie says a couple of Alonso sons are likely to feature in the 2023 sale.

Black Forest Park operates breeding programmes focusing on venison growth rates, velvet production and trophy antler-producing stud sire stags for the deer industry.

To subscribe to the Black Forest Park mailing list and keep up to

date on sales and offerings, please send your name and address to richard@blackforest.co.nz

- Article supplied





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Award day at Arawata

A stand of 700-year-old kahikatea and kowhai at John and Mel Somerville's Southland farm, Arawata, was an awe-inspiring sight for the 28 visitors at a field day to mark the couple's winning of a Deer Farmers Environment Award.



John (centre) and Mel Somerville are presented with the Duncan New Zealand Award on the company's behalf by retired DINZ producer manager, Tony Pearce (left).

THERE WAS A good mix of farmers, rural professionals, local and central government officials and even a social scientist in attendance.

The **Duncan New Zealand** Award for demonstrating forward thinking and innovative farm practices while operating in a demanding environment was won by the couple as part of the 2021 environment awards. The field day had been delayed somewhat thanks to Covid disruptions over the past 18 months.

It's a demanding environment all right. From a high point on the farm, the southernmost point of the South Island, and Rakiura/Stewart Island, are visible. There's not a lot to warm up the air on its journey from Antarctica to this part of Southland.

The Somervilles have started the process of covenanting part of their property to the QE2 Trust. (Incidentally, the Trust was started by farmers who were concerned that too much of the natural environment would be destroyed by an over-enthusiastic government programme of land development for farming.)

QE2 Trust Southland representative Jesse Blythell told visitors it is possible to covenant individual trees, as well as blocks of land, something that could be useful where significant specimens stand within a productive area.

John's father Walter pioneered the use of wintering sheds in Southland after he'd seen them demonstrated for sheep at a field day. They are still an important part of the farm infrastructure for wintering velvet stags and John has since added a self-feed area.

The family have always taken a pragmatic approach to developing their farm for deer. Existing sheep fences were topped up and areas clearly unsuited to livestock have been progressively retired. John commented that doing this doesn't seem to have affected farm productivity.

He showed how he had worked with the "lie of the land" to plant and fence gullies and focus production on the "good" areas. (Unfortunately none of these retired and planted areas would receive any credit for carbon sequestration under current emissions pricing proposals, showing the proposals are not quite right yet.)

John also noted that deer don't create the fertility hot spots that you can get with sheep stock camps.

There was good discussion on the day, including the latest recycling options for plastics. And speaking of putting plastics to good use, visitors also got to see the "Somerville outrigger" first hand – a simple system for attaching an outrigger to a deer fence using nails and lengths of alkathene. ■



Some of the 700-year-old trees.

CIITE: continued

1,780 clippings – 1,420 of them relating to the debuted retail-packaged venison products alone. The campaign comprised a venison trade presenter and brochure, finished packaging and new recipes, public relations activity including an exclusive media dinner for eight Shanghai-based business reporters and an event for Chinese customers.

"Our onsite venison tasting activities attracted a lot of attention and wowed the audience," Tan says, adding the coverage has been "phenomenal". Chinese consumers can now buy the latest venison

products directly through on- and off-line channels.

In other business, four agreements were signed with key customers, one of which was Dingdong, a newly emerging e-commerce platform with a transaction volume forecast to reach NZ\$12 million (RMB 50 million) in 2023, she reports. This was helped by the first senior New Zealand representative in two years, Silver Fern Farms board member Sam Robinson, attending the event. ■

Wetlands focus on South Canterbury farm

Managing wetlands as farm assets, a project led by NZ Landcare Trust, was the theme for a field day at Sam and Annabelle Bray's farm, Glendonald, on 19 October. The project is supported by NZDFA and DINZ among others.

THE DEER, SHEEP and beef business is made up of 760 hectares across three properties on rolling country at Albury in South Canterbury (see also *Deer Industry News*, August/September 2019).

The day was attended by a mix of 33 sheep, beef, deer and dairy farmers, sharing a common interest in better ways to keep soil and nutrients where they belong – in paddocks.

The handout noted that sediment traps are a second line of defence, while farm management policies and proactive decisions to prevent runoff of sediment, phosphorus and other contaminants form the first line.

First, understand what you've got

NZ Landcare Trust said there is often a temptation to simply fence the area off, spray it out, then put in some native plants and forget it.

For wetland restoration they recommended:

- understanding the wetland area (ownership, status, location)
- knowing what's going on: vegetation, hydrology, soil type, man-made and other features
- knowing what type of wetland it is, its history and, if it was modified, what it could be
- working out landowner goals and objectives and what work is needed to meet them
- ongoing monitoring.

At Glendonald there's a string of constructed ponds, made for a variety of uses including stock water, sediment trapping, a duck pond and an ice-skating rink. Some were starting to become like wetlands and the Trust was working with the Brays to understand what was growing there, fence where needed and enhance the areas.

One visitor commented that restoring ruts along fencelines from deer pacing removed a major source of sediment. Sam Bray noted that when winter grazing they leave a generous grass buffer along the fencelines. If they don't, soil accumulates along the fences and has to be moved.

ECan biodiversity adviser Jason Butt said sediment in streams filled the gaps between stones that are usually homes for invertebrates, so this removes an important source of food for fish.



Linked ponds, fenced off and ready for planting at Glendonald.

Role of eDNA tests

The use of eDNA testing has become available recently, although it is relatively expensive and only picks up what is already in the reference database. It was suggested that a test every five years would provide useful snapshots of what was in the water.

A recent test at a Glendonald pond showed evidence of a wide variety of species. The birds that had left DNA traces weren't what you'd expect (waterfowl) but rather magpies and common songbird species. Myriad worms, crustaceans, plants, algae, bacteria, mammals (including possums), molluscs and other single-celled or simple life forms had also called the pond home – or at least left their mark.

Sam said he wants to retire as many of the numerous swales and ephemeral waterways as he can, and will connect them with sediment traps coupled with riparian plantings.

Jason Butt recommended getting the fencing in as soon as possible and not getting hung up and delayed by deciding what to plant. Wetlands are capable of self-healing, so progress will be made once it's fenced, even if no planting is done for a time.

Sam uses toetoe, mingimingi (a *Coprosma*), flax and cabbage trees for plantings. It was noted that tall shrubs that shade the ground should be avoided since this would reduce the amount of vegetation that could filter out sediment before it reached the waterway. ■



Visitors at the wetlands field day.

Mararoa: Showing how it's done in challenging conditions

The Fiordland P2P Deer Industry Environment Group finally got to have its visit to Pāmu's Mararoa Station, Te Anau to view its ongoing environmental work, on 19 October. The day had been delayed for over a year thanks to Covid-related disruption, but it was worth the wait.¹

THE DAY WAS hosted by Mararoa manager **Matt Canton**, with long-serving Waiau Trust member **Mark Sutton**.

Mararoa farm facts

- One of NZ's original deer farms
- Seven staff
- Bought by Pāmu in 2000, added to Princhester block
- 5,500 ha, 4,500 effective
- 1,950 ha deer fenced
- 700 ha either retired into QE2 covenants or Waiau Trust Habitat Enhancement Agreements (HEA), tree lanes or thick matagouri, native bush
- Breeding and finishing sheep, cattle and deer
- 39,000 stock units
- 13,500 crossbred ewes, 1,050 Angus cows, 4,000 red hinds
- 1,400 hinds mated to wapiti, 850 replacements, 2,500 finishing
- 280 ha winter crop for cattle and deer
- Ewes wintered on grass

The farm's immediate focus includes different wintering methods, shade and shelter, waterway protection and understanding the environmental impacts of their operation. They are wanting to better understand their emissions status, reduce chemical usage over time, better align production to market timing and other requirements, and maintain or enhance the asset.



Matt Canton (left) talks to the environment group before the farm tour.

What is the Waiau Trust?

The Waiau Fisheries and Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Trust was established in 1996 and was the result of the negotiations between the community (the Waiau Working Party) and ECNZ (now Meridian Energy Limited). It was designed to mitigate and remedy the adverse effects the Manapouri Power Scheme had, and continues to have, on the fisheries and wildlife values of the Waiau Catchment in Southland. The Trust provides 25 percent of the costs for fencing off waterways that drain into the Waiau catchment.

Matt Canton said their planting for shade and shelter needs to provide multiple benefits, including carbon sequestration and eventual harvest. Shelter belts didn't really fit it with that.

He said they are very aware of the approaching 2025 deadline for excluding stock from waterways on low-slope land. Unfortunately, the currently tight returns from venison put a squeeze on how much is available for further fencing. He said riparian planting and retirement takes time and has to fit in with farm budgets.

Canton said Mark Sutton had made an invaluable contribution to Mararoa's environmental journey over a long period.

Sutton was more modest about his role, but urged visitors to "just start getting stock out of waterways" and to "think long term [about fencing] and give it time". He said they hadn't done much riparian planting at Mararoa because grass outcompeted the plants, but said native plants like tussocks eventually re-establish naturally in the fenced-off areas (see below on seeding trial).

He said that as long as there is still a seed source in the ground, native plants will come back on their own. He added that native forest costs \$40,000/ha to establish, almost 10 times as much as pine forest.

The success story for native revegetation was with manuka and flax, which could "push through" the grass and only needed maintenance for a year.

That said, the success with manuka has been mixed. Although it usually establishes well, there are patches where it starts to die back after about 5 years. This happens throughout the Te Anau basin and is puzzling because there is evidence of older stands of manuka. Interestingly, a variety of manuka introduced from the Gisborne region because of its high UMF value, actually does well in this area. Mark Sutton noted that the die-back is probably related to the mycorrhizal fungi that manuka need, but there might be other factors involved too.

¹ This article has been prepared from extensive notes and photos of the day taken by group facilitator, Nicola McGrouther.

Assessing change on the ground

Mayflies in a waterway are generally an indicator of good stream health. New eDNA tests give a much more detailed picture of what is in the waterways, although not how abundant the life forms are.

Another on-the-spot test is the “shuffle test” where you shuffle on a stream bed in your gumboots and give a score from 1–5 on the size and duration of the sediment plume you kick up.

Using photo points to record changes over time is invaluable, and the speakers advised fixing markers on posts and recording the GPS location so you can return and take photos over the years. It was important that the photos are always looking in the same direction, from the same point, at the same time of year.



Thomas Burn: now in a QE2 covenant.

Thomas Burn Stream

This was the first of six stops on the station tour. It used to be grazed by cattle but is now in a QE2 covenant. Twenty-six km of fencing has been put in to protect a 13 km stretch of the stream.

It's a significant and wide area, and hosts the last stand of red tussock on the property. Sutton said Coprosmas were starting to emerge and the protected area would eventually revert to beech forest.

A challenge for the future is to protect against Douglas fir wildings, which spread from a plantation further up the catchment.



This riparian strip is the only place where plants have been put in.

Riparian site

A narrower strip fenced off to protect a stream connecting to Lake Thomas is the only place where plantings have been done. Tussock and matagouri have regenerated naturally, but flax and manuka are planted.

The requirement for a 20 m buffer between winter grazing and the QE2 block is somewhat frustrating, Canton said, as the block itself is a buffer. “We also have to be able to farm.”



There is some damage in the small guts on the far side of this block, but it acts as a good buffer for any runoff.

Bartletts QE2 block

Broom had been an issue in this area, but this is now well controlled and requires only half a day each year to deal with any regrowth.

Canton said one issue with this block was that some small guts above it had some damage from deer, but fencing them off would be very expensive. He said the block itself provides a huge buffer and may well be filtering all the runoff from the impact of the deer.

Sediment trap

This had been put in at the bottom of a critical source area. It acts as a primary trap for sediments before water carries on through the Bartletts QE2 block. The trap is cleaned out as required. Sutton noted that ideally protection work should start at the top of catchment and work down, but ultimately you have to “do what’s practical and works for the farmer”.

Pond/wetland area

Although planting natives can be expensive, using a single-furrow seeder to get them established comes in at only 20 percent of that cost. Sutton showed a protected area around a wetland where strips had been sprayed out and then seeded with manuka, flax, cabbage trees and pittosporums. The seeding is followed by another spray to suppress competition while the plants are coming through. The site here is now 2 years old.

The techniques have worked very well in Australia for establishing eucalypts and acacia.

Flats

Oxbows in the flats, crossed by a meandering creek, were a magnet for deer making wallows and big source of sediment during rains, so the waterway has now been fenced off with a wide exclusion zone. Canton said having damage from deer in creeks “is no longer acceptable”.

continued on page 18

Field day to mark premier award win

Article and photos by Vivienne Haldane

The 2021 Premier Elworthy Environmental Award was a well-deserved accolade for Grant and Sally Charteris who were described by award judge Tony Pearse as “meticulous planners”.

A FIELD DAY on 5 October at Forest Road Farm, their red deer stud and velvet operation, allowed visitors to see the farm and what the couple have achieved.

Among the guests was Dr Gyongjai Lee, a major South Korean NZ deer velvet marketer and Elworthy Award sponsor. Forest Road Farm also won a newly created award, The SP Corporation and Dr Gyongjai Lee Award for environmentally sustainable velvet farming.

The Korean guests included a film crew who documented the event. Travelling over the hilly country in farm vehicles must have been a unique and very Kiwi experience for them.

A deer farming couple who had made the trip from Christchurch commented that they’d looked forward to seeing the farm and gaining insights for their own business.

Forest Road Farm

The 332 ha farm borders Gwavas Forest and is close to the Ruahine Ranges in Central Hawke’s Bay. Although it was spring, a cold snap had guests reaching for their cold-weather gear.

A convoy of about 80 toured the farm on a carefully monitored, two-hour trip. Topics along the way included conservation practices – where and why they’ve decided to plant or retire certain areas – and animal health and welfare. This goes hand in hand with creating a sustainable business says Grant. “The environmental work has to fit well with animal welfare and be profitable too.”

Grant and Sally have fenced and planted critical source areas and smaller waterways, carefully chosen which paddocks they’ll crop and created 10 m-wide buffer zones in gullies. Deer are

managed with minimal disruption and are allowed plenty of room to move freely with their social groups.

As we headed back down into the valleys, we saw areas of flax, toetoe and a variety of native trees within areas of fenced-off waterways.

In the past five years, Grant and Sally, with help from the local community and schools, have planted more than 20,000 native trees.



Plantings starting to come away at Forest Road Farm, with generous buffer zones at the bottoms of the slopes.

Abundant rainfall this year means not only are these young trees flourishing, but the landscape is also bowling lawn green. It was a good sign ahead for summer, but as farmers in the region know only too well, it can quickly dry up and turn brown.

Back at the deer shed, Dr Gyongjai Lee presented Grant and

Mararaoa: continued



Mark Sutton explains the reasoning behind the sediment trap.



Tussocks have started to re-establish naturally in the fenced-off area on the flats.

Sally with their award, after which guests were treated to a BBQ (venison, of course!) put on by FirstLight Foods and Silver Fern Farms.

Dr Lee and Grant Charteris then carried out the Elworthy Award tree-planting ceremony to mark the occasion (see also Velvet Market Report on page 11).



Dr Lee, with Grant and Sally Charteris, giving the thumbs up for New Zealand deer velvet.

Transition to stud

Forest Road farm is a third-generation business, purchased originally by Grant's grandmother Penny in 1956 for six pounds an acre.

"The four paddocks were a back holding of Gwavas Station, and my father, Bruce, took it to the next level. His focus was big, venison-type animals and tidy velvet. I came home in 2002 and farmed with dad," Grant said.

Initially, Grant leaned towards sheep and beef but soon got hooked on velvet.

"In the past 10 years, we have transitioned the farm into a red deer stud. That's the passion and driver for us. The environmental aspect has morphed together with our farming philosophy. After losing dad (tragically, Bruce died in an accident on the farm in 2013), we reset our goals and adopted a coaching approach with mentor and coach Dick Kingston (RJK Strategic Directions Ltd). In collaboration with Dick, Sally and I worked out what

was important for us. We aim to be the best red deer stud in New Zealand."

Stock management

While deer are the predominant stock class, cattle and sheep usefully complement the main operation.

"Everything fits well, so we can farm the deer," Grant explained. "Hereford cattle groom the pastures and produce a good product; Wiltshire sheep clean up laneways and control ragwort, which is a problem here; they are profitable and perform well because there aren't many of them and the sheep worm burden is low.

"Deer are browsers, not grazers. If you can allow deer to browse in a way they would naturally and do the hard work with something else, it helps to express their genetic potential."

Winning formula

In summing up what made Grant and Sally winners of the Elworthy Environmental Award, Tony Pearce said their partnership was always looking for new opportunities with excellent sustainable business and farm planning.

Other factors included, excellent stock management and strong genetic improvement, use of technology to lift the growth and quality of velvet production, as well as the protection and enhancement of their farm environment.

Tony was also impressed by Grant and Sally's involvement in their local community and with the NZ Deer Farmers' Association at branch and national levels.

"Having a good work-life balance, being happy and enjoying what we do is important," they concluded. ■

Forest Road Farm facts

- Rolling to steep (Class 6) hill country
- 495 m above sea level
- Rainfall: 1200 mm/year
- Total farm area: 332.1 ha
- Effective deer-fenced area: 310 ha
- Stock units/ha: 11.15
- Deer: cattle: sheep 82:13:5
- Products: Velvet, venison, beef, lamb, stud deer
- Crops: Kale and swedes.

Some final thoughts from Matt and Mark

- Think big picture, 50-100 years out
- Give it time
- Retire the obvious areas first and allow decent widths and margins
- Aim for plantings that are connected, e.g., via corridors created along fenced-off waterways, building a biodiversity network rather than isolated patches
- Ideally start at the top of a catchment and work down, but do what works for you
- Make a plan and work through it
- Target areas likely to have a native seed source, exclude stock and control weeds

- Check what funding sources are available in your area to help pay for environmental enhancement work (e.g., Jobs for Nature programme, regional council funding). ■



The results of the seeding trial are starting to show up after 2 years.

Using terminal sires to maximise income

If you've been in the industry for a while, you'll know the mantra: to maximise income from venison, have your rising yearlings ready for slaughter in spring, ideally with a carcass weight of 65 kg or better. DINZ *Deer Fact* editor **Trevor Walton** went on a search to find out what it takes to get your young venison animals away before Christmas in the premium weight range.



Crossbred weaners at Peter and Diane Lowe's mid-Canterbury farm. They're showing what can be achieved with a simple, high-performance, venison production system.

All away at 65 kg or better before Christmas

All it takes to get your venison weaners away at prime weights in spring is to put an elk/wapiti over your red hinds and Bob's your uncle. Would that it was so simple.

Some are getting all their weaners to 65+ kg carcass weights in spring, but some are not.

Why? It's complicated. Hind and sire selection, mating management, internal parasite control and feeding all need to be on-point.

Geography, rainfall and the season play a big part too. Loss of feed quality over summer is a challenge for some. As a result, weaners may be too small going into winter to reach killable weights in spring.

Selection of sires based on their individual performance, rather than their breeding values – the genes they pass on to their progeny – is a missed opportunity for many. Put simply, big bulls/stags don't necessarily sire progeny that have consistently high growth rates.

The *Deer Fact*, "Terminal sires for profitable venison production" that was enclosed in the August *Deer Industry News* looks at all aspects of terminal venison production.

Before finalising this *Deer Fact*, I visited three farmers running terminal venison systems, two in Canterbury and one in North Otago. I sought feedback from leading terminal sire breeders and asked three gurus for their advice – Tony Pearse, Dave Lawrence and Jamie Ward.

All three farmers have made great progress getting some or all of their finishers away for slaughter before Christmas, at ever better weights. They're all using high-growth-rate terminal sires – elk/wapiti, B11s and high-growth-rate reds – but not across any old hind.

We all know that the female contributes half the DNA to her sons and daughters, but many of us only think that way when it comes to selecting replacement breeding hinds. I know I have. But terminal systems are no different. It's not just about the blokes.

Mum has as much say as Dad when it comes to the important venison growth traits. Key genetic traits for high return finishing are resistance to parasites (Carla score), eye muscle area score and growth rate to 12 months. They all affect the profitability of weaner finishing.

In a terminal venison system, the female is from a smaller breed or strain than the male. This makes the system more efficient in converting grass to meat (and in its greenhouse gas emissions intensity) than same-breed production systems. This is because smaller females cost less to feed, especially during winter, which means you can run more of them or better allocate quality winter feed to finishing animals.

Clearly, if all hinds were elk/wapiti, weighing 180 kg or so, getting weaners to killable weights in spring would be a breeze. But it's not as efficient as using red hinds weighing much less than this.

How much less?

continued on page 22

ELK & WAPITI SUPPLIERS

Trophy Suppliers:

Tracey McLean - Achmahana - tracey@sockworks.co.nz

Paul Waller - Longridge Elk - pwallerelk@gmail.com

Tom May - Mayfield Elk Farm - tom@mayfieldek.com

Mike McBride - mikemcbride@xtra.co.nz

Peter Robinson - naturewins28@gmail.com

Tony Pullar - tonypullar1@outlook.com

Neville Cunningham - Mt Cook Trophy Hunting - contact@mtcooktrophyhunting.co.nz

Terminal Sire - Auctions:

Raincliff Station Wapiti (and Trophy Supplier):

Pleasant Point

Mon 9th Jan 2023, 11am

Dave Morgan, 027-230 3357

Lochinvar Wapiti:

Te Anau

Sun 15th Jan 2023, 1.30pm

Ross Carran, 027-289 7563

Littlebourne Wapiti:

Winton

Mon 16th Jan 2023, 1.30pm

Geoff Pullar, 027-617 9971

Private Treaty Suppliers

North Is:

Totara Park Wapiti:

Dean Wilkinson, totarapark@orcon.net.nz

Ph 027-403 5440

Steinvale Wapiti:

Harley Steiner, Ph 027-431 7431

Oraka Wapiti:

Ian Scott, orakadeer@xtra.co.nz

At 12 mths
Wapiti x Red
70kg

Terminal Sire - Auctions:

Tikana Wapiti:

Winton

Mon 16th Jan 2023, 3.30pm

Dave Lawrence, 03-236 4117

Clachanburn Elk

(and Trophy Supplier):

Patearoa

Tues 17th Jan 2023, 1pm

John Falconer, 027-434 4593

At 12 mths

Red x Red

57kg

Private Treaty Sire Suppliers South Is:

Hasse Elk Farm:

Grant Hasse, hasseelk@gmail.com

Ph 027-224 5542

Montalto Elk:

John Bartholomew, jbart@xtra.co.nz

Ph 027-490 5782

Edendale Wapiti:

Mt Somers

Donald Whyte, 03-303 9842

ELK WAPITI SOCIETY NZ

For further information: www.elkwapitisociety.co.nz / elkwapitinz@gmail.com

Terminals: continued

Everyone seems to agree that the hinds should be no lighter than 115 kg and ideally 120 kg-plus.

Tony Pearce emphasises the need for hinds to be big-framed: “Don’t focus on weight alone ... a fat hind may weigh 115 kg, but that’s not what you are looking for. If you have hinds as small as 115 kg in your terminal mob, they need to be big-framed.”

Why? Well, put it down to sex stereotypes.

During the roar, the male struts his stuff and contributes his DNA to as many hinds as he can manage. Then, having had his fun, he’s given some flash tucker and a trendy new drench because he’s feeling a bit poorly. That’s it. All he now needs to do is maintain himself until he’s needed to provide the same service next year.

For the female, the fun is over. She now needs to carry a large fawn to term eight months later, give birth to it safely and then produce enough milk for it to grow rapidly until it’s weaned. To do all these things, she needs to be robust and big framed.

Mid-Canterbury farmer **Diane Lowe** reckons their elk/red crossbred hinds probably weigh about 150 kg. This is heavier than most farmers would want, but works well for them. They don’t breed their own replacements and until this year it’s been critical on their mixed cropping farm to have all of their finishers away at maximum weights in spring. They are on irrigated free-draining land, so winter pasture damage is not an issue.

“Our target is to have all our weaners sold at an average carcass weight of 70 kg before a new crop of fawns is on the ground.”



Big-framed crossbred hinds at the Lowes’ in mid-Canterbury. Getting weaners away at 70 kg carcass weight before Christmas depends on the female as much as it does on the genetics of the male.

The two other farms – Andy Keating and Chris Whyte at Wakaepa in central Canterbury, and Dallas Newlands at Maraeweka in North Otago – are aiming for hinds in the 125–130 kg range. This makes the production of spring venison achievable, while not making it too difficult to get their yearling hinds up to mating weights on their summer-dry hill country.

“Even in our velvet genetics females we trying to keep the size up because at least half their progeny are going to end up as venison,” Keating says.

Better genetics have been combined with better feeding. “Our first calvers are now 100 kg or better – it’s almost a 20 kg increase in the past five years.” In the same timeframe, scanning percentages in first calvers have increased from 65–70 percent to the mid-90s.

On the male side, all three farmers have used, or are currently

using, sires with elk/wapiti genetics. Waps with good growth rate BVs are a proven engine for improved weaner growth rates. But internal parasite management needs to be spot-on when you are running elk/wapiti bulls.

At Wakaepa, deer manager **Chris Whyte** is steeped in Fiordland wapiti lore. He captured and farmed them in Southland and was project manager for the Fiordland Wapiti Foundation for many years, before relocating to North Canterbury. Yet he struggles to keep Fiordland wapiti bulls in good condition during winter on the farm’s hard North Canterbury hills.

He’s also used elk/wapiti sires from Mt Possession and Raincliff. These have given him good results in terms of progeny, but again he’s struggled to maintain sire condition during winter.

Whyte puts a big emphasis on feeding and animal health, so he and farm manager Andy Keating are at a loss as to the reasons for ill-thrift in their sires. They suspect it relates to transitioning sires onto the farm’s hill block, where the hinds are run, which is mainly native pasture.



Wakaepa, deer manager Chris Whyte, with crossbred hinds in late June. He puts a big emphasis on feeding and animal health.

Since their farm-bred deer appear to cope better than sires bred elsewhere, Keating and Whyte are planning to breed their own terminal sires. Their idea is to buy in a top elk/wapiti sire each year and mate him to the best of the farm’s crossbred hinds, to produce commercial sires for use in the farm’s terminal mobs.

I asked deer veterinarian and elk/wapiti breeder Dave Lawrence what’s likely to be going on. He doesn’t know the farm, but says ill-thrift when transitioning to a new farm should “not be a thing”, so long as internal parasites are well controlled and stock are provided with quality feed at crucial times.

He emphasises the critical importance of drenching elk/wapiti bulls with *Cervidae Oral* before the rut and as soon as they are withdrawn from the hinds in mid-to-late April (see panel, page 24).

Dallas Newlands has dry hill country that’s similar to the Wakaepa hills. He’s dealing to it with a massive pasture improvement programme, as well as K-line irrigation.

He says he used to put elk/wapiti over his 110 kg hinds, but struggled with parasite problems in the sires.

“So I changed to Peel Forest B11s and Melior terminal reds. They weigh about 270 kg, so they’re big. I don’t know what one will turn out to be best. I’m sitting on the fence,” Newlands says.

“I also switched at Easter to using *Cervidae Oral* with the weaners.”

He’s putting Melior maternal stags over his breeding hinds, with the aim of increasing hind weights to 125 kg.

“In 10 years we’ve gone from 45 kg weaners in spring to 60 kg. Our best hinds have gone from 110 kg to 120 kg. Our genetics has jumped so fast in the past 10 years: growth rate, eye muscle area and so on. We’re now making the sort of genetic progress we’ve seen in the sheep industry in recent decades.”



Dallas Newlands with his hinds during a wet and cold winter. He’s thrilled with the genetic progress he’s made in the past 10 years, despite this year’s setback.

Less perennial ryegrass, thanks

Better feeding is clearly one of the biggest success factors in the finishing operations on all three farms.

The Lowes have 21 ha in lucerne, 10 ha of raphno and 26 ha of winter feed rape to boost pasture feed supply. And when they sow permanent pasture they sow new varieties of ryegrass, cocksfoot, clover and plantain where once they would have sown just ryegrass and white clover. Peter Lowe says he looks at the trial data and gets the best genetics for grazing regrowth that he can afford.

Indeed, all three farms are reducing their reliance on that old mainstay, perennial rye.

In Whyte’s words, “Deer don’t like it. It goes to seed in late spring when you need quality feed for hinds and fawns. It causes staggers. It’s nothing but trouble.

“Most of our progress is due to better feeding. Clovers, plantain, chicory on our irrigated flats at Hororata in autumn. We also grow red clover and lucerne. In the winter we feed swedes, fodder beet, baleage, rye-corn and some grass – the important thing is to give deer quality and choice.”

He says getting better growth on their hill block is a big challenge. The pastures there tend to revert to native within a couple of years of being replaced. Sowing some of the flats in the block in pure stands of red clover has been a step forward, but in the meantime early weaning is essential on these dry hills.

“We wean in late February and move the weaners straight onto irrigated grass in Hororata, where their growth takes off. The males weigh 53 kg at weaning and the females 48 kg. By 1 May, the girls put on 15 kg and the boys 18 kg. Think how much better they’d do if they had a better start.”

Newlands says his pasture mixes are now based on a fescue/ cocksfoot mix plus clovers. Two years after establishment he sprays the pasture and broadcasts plantain. He’s tried chicory but, on his country, it goes stalky too early for the deer.

Each winter, about 50 ha of his 320 ha goes into fodder beet, which he double-crops. In year one he sprays twice and strip tills. In the second year he works up the whole area and sows the fodder beet in traditional rows.

His aim is to get the deer off pasture so he has maximum grass regrowth in spring.

“August/September is our main pinch period ... the deer have lost interest in the beet and the grass is not really growing fast enough to satisfy their feed demands.”

To tide them over, the deer get lucerne baleage, cut from a 35 ha stand on the farm. As Newlands points out, it costs the same to bale straw as it does lucerne, “so we give them the best”.

What came out in the wash?

For the Lowes, the 2022 season has been positive. A wetter-than-normal summer set them up well for autumn, even if it did increase the pressure from parasites. Diane says drenching with *Cervidae Oral* did the trick, but observed that would not have been a good season to extend the recommended intervals between drenches. After four weeks, the weaners were ready for their next dose.



Diane and Peter Lowe with their weaners in June. Since the weaners averaged 92 kg on 1 May, with the heaviest 124.5 kg, it’s no surprise that many of them achieved a 70 kg target carcass weight in spring.

Until this year, the best average spring draft weight the Lowes had achieved was 68 kg. This year they broke their record, with two September drafts killing out at 74.5 kg and 70.1 kg.

They also broke with past practice, thanks to a little profitable price persuasion from Mountain River. They are growing out half of their weaners until January, for sale at much heavier weights for the US elk venison market. When we spoke in late October they weren’t quite sure how this would fit in with their cropping rotations, but figured it was worth the juggle.

For Newlands, the spring chilled season proved to be a big disappointment. He got one draft of 130 finishers away in September at only 51 kg – “one of my worst results ever” – tempered only by a contract price of \$9.30/kg. The second draft of 130 was due to be processed in November, which will leave 300 weaners still on the farm, going into summer.

He had expected much better.

continued on page 24

Three generations welcome new agreement

THREE GENERATIONS OF Canterbury's Stokes family joined DINZ and Korea Ginseng Corporation (KGC) to celebrate the signing of a new memorandum of understanding between DINZ and KGC on their Canterbury farm on 21 November. Pictured from left are KGC CEO, Her Chul-ho, Stu Stokes, Holly Stokes, Bruce Stokes and DINZ CEO Innes Moffat. We'll have fuller coverage of this event in our next issue. ■



22nd Elite Sire Stag & Yearling Hind Sale



Bluerock – 13.1kg @ 6yrs
Sire of Keystone – Lot 1 2022



Brock Deer



Lazarus – 13kg @ 5yrs
Lot 1 2020 – NZ Record

Wednesday 11th January 2023, 6.30pm



Effen – 11.8kg @ 5yrs

Sires Represented:

- Kelso**
- Pascoe**
- Carrington**
- Rocky**

50+ 2yr Velvet Stags



The Emperor – 14.2kg @ 4yrs

Eddie Brock 027 6076822

Elliot Brock 027 2776733

Facebook: Brock Deer

Survey highlights changes

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

The latest CINTA survey of 600 people, representing more than 40 percent of deer farmers, has highlighted continuing trends in the deer industry.

THE DINZ-COMMISSIONED SURVEY follows similar ones done in 2011 and 2017. With the passing of more than a decade since the first survey, the evolution of the industry is becoming clearer. These are some of the highlights.

Practice change

About 30 percent of those surveyed were members of an Advance Party (AP) or Deer Industry Environment Group (DIEG). In comparison with other deer farmers, the AP/DIEG members tended to:

- use innovative practices and new technology
- do more formal measuring, monitoring and feed budgeting
- pay more attention to environmental impacts
- seek out new information and use rural professionals
- have higher incomes.

In addition to AP/DIEG members, deer farmers with larger herds and higher gross incomes are more likely to adopt innovative practices. Conversely, those with smaller herds, lower gross incomes and who aren't members of NZDFA are less likely to be tapping into DINZ and P2P resources.

Use of breeding values for stag selection has also increased strongly, a good sign that buying decisions are becoming ruled by heads (not necessarily the antlers though) rather than hearts. However about 20 percent of all deer farmers were unaware of Deer Select.

Not all practice change sticks. For example, only about half of all finishers were regularly weighing weaners to monitor growth, well down on levels in 2011 and 2017. Farmers are paying attention to nutrition however, with greater numbers getting herbage or pasture analysis done.

About three-quarters of velvet producers boost nutrition prior to button drop and about 70 percent do comprehensive recording and run a dedicated antler breeding programme. These levels rose sharply after 2011 and have stayed about the same as in 2017.

Profitability

This was more likely to have increased if a farm had:

- a larger herd
- higher gross farm incomes
- a higher proportion of farm income derived from deer.

Reasons for downsizing

Age and/or retirement, and financial aspects (e.g. lower product prices) are two of the most common reasons given in the survey among those who anticipate downsizing their deer operations.

Velvet on the up

The proportion of all deer farmers producing velvet has risen

sharply, from about one-third of farms in 2011 to two-thirds in 2022.

Only about 6 percent of surveyed farms had a purely velvet focus in 2011. That proportion rose steeply to about 20 percent of all farms in 2017, and remains at that level today.

DFA membership

The proportion of farmers who are paid-up NZDFA members is still strong at 76 percent, although this figure has slipped from 84 percent in 2017.

Measuring and condition scoring

Most hind body condition scoring is done by eye, with about one-third of farmers saying they monitor weights and about a third doing formal feed budgeting.

Overall, most farmers said they monitor weight and condition, with sample weights and use of the DINZ growth charts increasing significantly over the past five years.

Environment

The survey noted that farming sustainably and improving a property environmentally is becoming a more important motivator for change than it was in previous years, with fewer barriers to change now being perceived. Of the barriers to change, financial barriers were the most commonly mentioned. About 40 percent reported having a Farm Environment Plan in place and a further 20 percent report they make decisions based on an environment risk assessment they have completed.

Get the vet

Veterinarians are significantly more likely to be mentioned as a way of keeping farming knowledge and skills up to date than in previous surveys and vet recommendations are the most influential factors in terms of changing on-farm policy or adopting new technology. Other deer farmers and DINZ are also commonly relied on for support and advice. Compared with earlier surveys, more deer farmers are taking a risk-based approach to parasite management.

Information resources

Deer Facts, the DINZ website and P2P regional workshops rated strongly as sources of useful information, with the positive response up over the past five years. Neighbours, consultant advice and articles in publications were also considered more useful compared with previous years. Older deer farmers, those with smaller herds and those not involved in NZDFA were less likely to engage with these resources. ■

Ian Walker farewelled on home patch in Hawke's Bay

by Kate Taylor

A special presentation was made to retiring DINZ board chair Ian Walker at the DINZ roadshow in Waipawa, Central Hawke's Bay, on 20 September.

AFTER A LONG veterinary career and direct involvement with the deer industry, Ian joined the DINZ board in 2016, becoming chair in 2017. Chief executive Innes Moffat said during Ian's time, DINZ had introduced a number of major initiatives, including the Regulated Control Scheme for deer velvet.

"Under Ian's stewardship it introduced VelTrak, a step forward in the technology that we were using for farm-to-processor traceability, as well many other benefits. He also oversaw our work through the Covid period. A very big thank you for your sage advice and wise words in what was a very difficult time for us all."

New DINZ chair Mandy Bell said Ian had tremendous input over a raft of initiatives making sure progress was about production, monitoring, and analysis.

"Ian's contribution goes back so much further than his time on the board. We used to look longingly at the Hawke's Bay deer farmers showing so much innovation. When you look at some of the programmes we have now, a huge portion of those came as a result of Hawke's Bay's input and Ian's guidance."

She said DINZ has benefitted from Ian's "steady hand at the helm", and thanked his family, and particularly wife Helen. One example of his commitment was spending time during an overseas holiday earlier this year "battling on our behalf at a critical time in the development of He Waka Eke Noa – thank you for that".

Ru Gaddum spoke on behalf of Hawke's Bay NZDFA chair Evan Potter, thanking Ian for his part in Hawke's Bay's legacy of leadership.

"Hawke's Bay has always contributed strongly to our industry, from the DINZ board, through to the Deer Farmers' Association and Selection and Appointments Panel, and playing a part in scientific and practical deer farming advances – all of which you

have also been involved with.

"We acknowledge your tenure as chair of DINZ was a tough, turbulent time for deer farmers with ongoing venison struggles and much regulation coming at us from Wellington.

This, coupled with disruption from Covid at almost every level and a TB outbreak in Northern Hawke's Bay, made for a challenging time at the helm."

When Ian retired from Vet Services in Waipukurau, he said Ponty von Dadelszen and the late John Spiers had "bailed him up" about helping out at DINZ.

"I thought about it and thought, well, 'I have time on my hands'. Little did I know that within 12 months I was going to be chair of the board," he laughed. "It's been a good journey. I've met a lot of people ... a unique bunch. The board is special because it's a mixture of deer farmers, producers and company people. Coupled with that is a good working relationship with the Deer Farmers' Association. It has been an interesting six years with a lot of fun and laughs, and a few 4 am wake ups." ■



Ian and Helen Walker at the farewell event.

Building on success

FARMERS ARE GOOD at planning; it is what makes their businesses successful. However, the number of different plans required these days is increasing. What are the opportunities to refine the planning process, remove duplication and make our farms even more self-sufficient and resilient?

DINZ is pleased to once again partner with the Ministry for Primary Industries on a project to help support deer farmers. The three-year \$700,000 project aims to make it easier for deer farmers to do business and become more resilient to change, improve farm performance and better manage risk through enhancing their planning approach to farm management.

DINZ is fortunate to have established groups in Advance Parties and Deer Industry Environment Groups. Together with the skilled facilitators, these are an ideal place to build on and extend the P2P programme, getting support for any new plans required for production, environment, people, biosecurity or marketing.

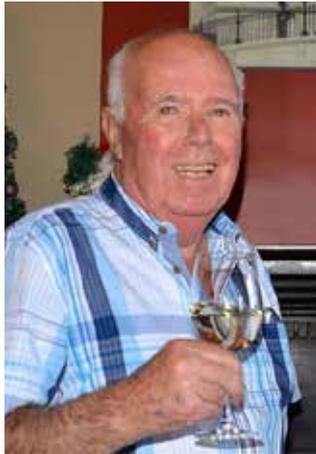
This project is about giving farmers the support they need and will eventually extend to all deer farmers. There are also strong opportunities to collaborate with other participating organisations, particularly Beef + Lamb NZ and catchment groups.

This project will kick off in early 2023 and we'll have more detail in future issues of *Deer Industry News*. ■

Haldon Station owner passes away

Johan (Han) Klisser, owner of Haldon Station since 1991, passed away on 9 November at the age of 95.

HAN, WHO LOST his family during the Holocaust, arrived in New Zealand from the Netherlands in 1951. He and wife Janna (Jenny), also from the Netherlands, started their own bakery in the 1950s and in the 1960s Klisser Farmhouse Bakeries gained the licence to make Vogel's bread in New Zealand. The highly successful business, which grew to be making half a million loaves of Vogel's a week, was sold to Goodman Fielder Wattie in 1991.



Looking for a new venture after selling the bakery business, the Klissers bought Haldon Station the same year, starting a successful partnership with manager Paddy Boyd and wife Barb, which has spanned decades.

Paddy says the Klissers had no background in farming before this, and saw Haldon at one of its hardest times. They fell in love with the place nonetheless. "Right from the start they said this was their baby and they wanted me to make it the best it could be for them – a model farm," Paddy says.

Expansion of irrigation on Haldon by the Klissers in recent years made a huge difference to the farm's productivity, and Paddy says that development typified their approach.

"They gave me great support and just wanted the figures to back up changes and developments such as the pivots. They always supported buying the best tools, be it machinery, stags or bulls."

Han loved the friendliness of the rural community in the Mackenzie district, and the way people would call out "giddy"

as they passed in Fairlie. "They never experienced that kind of connection in Auckland. They would come down for the stag sales as they loved the chats they could have with other farmers."

Paddy said that when they owned the bakery business the Klissers had travelled the world regularly to check out the latest tools of the trade. They continued that tradition after buying Haldon. "They took Barb and I to many parts of the world to look at farming practices, along with visits to Warnham and Woburn deer parks to look at stags."

He says the important contribution of deer to the bottom line was never lost on Han and Jenny Klisser, and they always supported good solid investment in new stags. They also appreciated and rewarded the hard work put in by the farm staff at Haldon Station.

"It's been a very successful working relationship. The Klissers have shown great kindness and faith in us, and the deer industry, over a long period and for that we thank them." ■

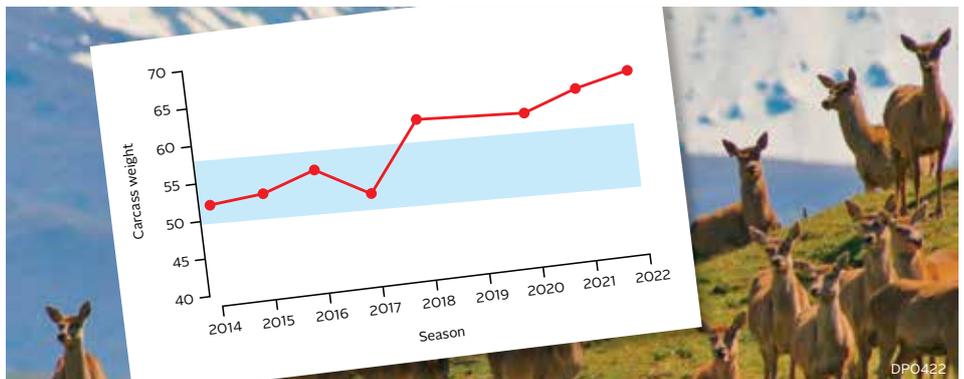


Paddy Boyd (left) with Jenny and Han Klisser at one of the stag sales they loved to visit.

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Venison Wellington

This classic British style venison dish from fresh.co.nz will grace any New Year's Eve dinner table. Venison Wellington is a seared venison tenderloin that has been covered with duxelles (a mushroom mix), wrapped in prosciutto and pastry and baked to perfection.

Serves: 6 • Prep time: 1 hr • Cook time: 1 hr 15 min • Total time: 2 hrs 15 min

Ingredients

- 1 kg New Zealand farm-raised venison tenderloin
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- Salt and pepper
- ¼ cup Dijon mustard
- 10–12 slices prosciutto
- 4 sheets puff pastry, thawed if frozen
- 1 egg beaten

Duxelles

- 1 tbsp butter
- 2 shallots peeled and halved
- 3 garlic cloves peeled and roughly chopped
- 650 g button mushrooms roughly chopped
- 1 tbsp Superb Herb thyme finely chopped

Method

1. Preheat oven to 200°C.
2. Let the venison come to room temperature, dry with a paper towel, tie into a roll with butcher's twine, brush with oil, then season with salt and pepper. Heat a large heavy-based frying pan on high heat. Once hot, sear the venison for 3 minutes on each side, including the tenderloin ends. Transfer to a chopping board. Let cool while you make the duxelles mix.
3. Make the duxelles: Add shallots, garlic and mushrooms to a blender and pulse until finely chopped. Add butter to a large

heavy set pan over medium heat. Add mushroom mix and cook, stirring often, for 20 minutes, until the liquids have evaporated and it forms a chunky paste. Stir in thyme, season with salt and pepper, and let cool completely.

4. Remove butcher's twine from venison and brush venison liberally with mustard.
 5. On a large piece of cling film (or two layered pieces) lay the prosciutto, overlapping to form a square. Spread thinly with duxelles mix, then place the venison tenderloin on, roll up tightly and place in the fridge to chill for 20 minutes.
 6. Unroll the four pastry sheets on a sheet of baking paper in a giant square and connect the sheets of puff with a rolling pin (or doubled overlapping baking paper). Remove and discard the cling film from the prosciutto roll and place in the middle of the pastry. Fold the pastry over the venison to cover completely. Trim the pastry if needed. Tightly roll the prepared venison Wellington in cling film and place in the fridge for 20 minutes.
 7. Remove and discard the cling film and place the Venison Wellington on a lined baking tray. Brush with beaten egg, sprinkle with salt, make some slits on top of pastry for the steam vent and bake for 40 minutes, until the pastry is golden brown and the internal temperature of the venison reaches 57°C (for medium-rare).
 8. Rest for 20 minutes, then place Venison Wellington on a serving platter or chopping board, slice and serve while warm with your favourite sides.
- Watch how to make it at: <https://youtu.be/BFxiwbfOGxg>
 - Get more recipes at www.fresh.co.nz ■



Invermay deer research hits the big five-oh



by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Back in the early '70s, before endless obstacles to good ideas were invented, farmers and scientists quietly got on with the job of getting a deer herd established behind the wire at Invermay and figuring out how to farm them.

THEY WERE EXCITING times, where every interaction with a deer was an adventure and scientists shared the passion and enthusiasm that pioneering farmers and innovators like Tim Wallis had for getting these “pest” animals to provide a new income stream. This was a period when diversification was the buzzword, and the research purse strings were gratifyingly loose.



Sir Tim Wallis dropped in by chopper to say hello to some of the many people he worked with in the early days of deer research. Sir Tim's pioneering innovation in live capture made a significant international contribution to wildlife and conservation biology. Here he chats with Colin Mackintosh (centre) and Victoria Chapman (right).

Half a century on, many of those who were there from the start gathered at AgResearch Invermay on 26 September to share memories and celebrate 50 years of deer research at the site.

In 1972 young scientist with the then Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, **Ken Drew**, was returning from his OE and wondering “what next?” Deer caught his eye and, with MAF veterinarian **Les Porter**, Ken convinced the Ministry to let them sow the seeds for a research programme, with the groups set up by Peter Fennessy.

Introducing the day of celebration, AgResearch's programme leader, Deer Science for Success, **Jamie Ward**, reflected on the contribution of Drew and Porter, as well as the support of then-director **Jock Allison** (who was also at the celebration). He said it was a combination of bravery, a willingness to take risks and a passion for deer to get the research programme kick started. He also highlighted the recent challenge by Minister of Agriculture, Damien O'Connor, for the deer sector to grow and become a \$1 billion industry – a challenge that should be embraced.

Ken Drew told guests that deer had been starting to appear

behind fences in Otago and Southland and they eventually approached **Herbie Taylor** at West Dome Station. After tortuous negotiations they entered a contract to “borrow” 90 hinds from the herd of 400 that West Dome had acquired through Tim Wallis.

This first batch produced 60 fawns. Drew said it then dawned on them they didn't have a sire stag for the next mating season so negotiated again to acquire a hand-reared sire, which they named “Herbie”.

The rut was approaching and Herbie was already pretty fractious. Drew said he was eventually subdued for the trip back to Invermay with the aid of some rope looped over his antlers to drag him up to the fence, and a “syringe on a stick”.

Herbie went on to perform well, siring many fawns out of Invermay's first deer herd. He “lives on” as a mounted head, a 50-year-old reminder of where it all started.

Herbie got around

Herbie had a remarkable journey in death as in life. Former Invermay director Jock Allison recalls the mounted head was presented to the agriculture minister of the time, Duncan McIntyre as a none-too-subtle reminder of what the deer industry and its scientists were achieving. McIntyre later told him that “every time he looked at Herbie he thought about Invermay”. The head found its way to the office of then MAF director-general Malcolm Cameron, before being presented back to the minister. McIntyre's family later returned Herbie to his turangawaewae at the Invermay campus.

Drew said the \$4.1 million allocated to deer research by the late 1970s was the biggest-ever research contract set up by the funding agency at the time, and was a remarkable vote of confidence in the abilities of the 18 staff at Invermay involved in the deer research.

He also acknowledged Professor **Frank Griffin** and the



Ken Drew gets reacquainted with “Herbie”, Invermay's first sire stag.

remarkable collaboration with the Disease Research Laboratory that had helped a small industry achieve so much in a short time.

AgResearch chief executive **Sue Bidrose** welcomed guests and noted that as a Dunedin City Councillor she'd been secretary of the successful "Save Invermay" campaign which presented a petition to Parliament in 2015 with more than 12,000 signatures. She said many challenges involving deer farming had been tackled at Invermay over the first 50 years of deer science and was looking forward to research continuing to contribute, especially around environmental management and social licence.

DINZ chair **Mandy Bell** echoed those sentiments, invoking the expression *Taiao Ora Tangata Ora*: if the land is healthy, the people are healthy. She recalled some of Tim Wallis's captured deer being dropped off at Criffel Station in the early days of the industry. "There was a lot to work out! What did we feed them? How did we velvet them? How did we deal with Johnes's disease, Tb and parasites? What about their reproductive physiology?"

Bell said a lot has been achieved in that first half century but there is still much to do. She said there was a fundamental shift going on where the industry was being transformed from simply farmers to landowners who must think not only about what they do on their own property, but about the impact they have outside their boundaries.

Another important player in the first 50 years of deer science had been veterinarians, who through Massey's Professor **Peter Wilson**, had early on formed a New Zealand Veterinary Association Deer Branch. Veterinarian and Invermay scientist **Colin Mackintosh** had of course played a key role in the disease research at the campus.

Bell said the unique collaboration between MAF/AgResearch scientists, universities, vets, deer farmers including Landcorp, and marketers had helped the industry make big strides quickly.



Deer scientists and staff past and present gathered [It was like herding cats. Ed.] for a group photo at the gala dinner (sponsored by Silver Fern Farms, menu designed by the tireless Graham Brown).

Farm tour

Guests were treated to a tour of the Invermay deer farm in a bus of an appropriate ('70s-era) vintage. Jamie Ward told guests an extensive fencing programme for the many waterways on the farm had made a huge difference to the amount of sediment being washed into the Silverstream River below the farm.

Cloning is a technique that is still sensitive because of its association with other genetic technologies, but in the early



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continued on page 32

Invermay 50: continued



Guests step off the vintage bus for a look around the Invermay farm.

2000s – about the time that Dolly the cloned sheep was gaining attention worldwide – scientists at Invermay led by Chunyi Li as a one-off trial successfully cloned two small cohorts of stags. The second cohort was cloned using stem cells from velvet antler. Jamie Ward explained that the work proved that velvet antler contained undifferentiated stem cells and that these could be used to clone deer. The antlers were kept for studying their symmetry and plenty of other observations were made. Ward said one outcome the researchers hadn't anticipated was that the sets of cloned stags, because they were perfectly matched genetically, couldn't establish a pecking order so fought continuously during the rut.

Thanks to the regulations around the technology and stigma attached to cloning that remains today, the work was never continued and the cloned stags were never allowed to be bred from.

Invermay's Bryan Thompson showed off the new home-developed GPS units that are being trialled on deer to study grazing behaviour to identify more efficient feeders on different



Jamie Ward with antlers from the stags cloned in the early 2000s.

landscapes and see if this trait can be selected for. About 200 of the units will be used (see photo next page).

How deer research evolved

Retired AgResearch scientist **Geoff Asher** took guests through a potted history of deer research, noting a few twists, turns and dead ends along the way. As he started, Asher gave a shoutout to other deer programmes outside Invermay, such as at Lincoln University led by Graham Barrell, and the Massey programme under Peter Wilson's supervision, initiating the great collaboration between institutions that continues to this day.

He said that under MAF, research was bulk funded and not contestable, but also there was no long-term security of funding. That all changed in 1992 with the breakup of government research efforts into Crown research institutes (CRIs). Suddenly they were competing with universities and other CRIs for research dollars, but also competing within the newly formed AgResearch. "It was a shock for us!"

Introducing Lynda Gray

It is with a mix of trepidation and anticipation that I step into the editor role for *Deer Industry News* from 2023.

THE ANXIETY IS due to the 25-year (or is it longer?) class act I'm following. Phil's award-winning coverage of all things deer has been outstanding and with that comes reader expectations of high-quality content and coverage.

But I'm up for the challenge and looking forward to balancing the art and craft of both reporter and editor. For most of my journalism career I've been a freelance contributor to agricultural and business-related publications. *Country-Wide* magazine has been my main focus, and it's this publication that led to my special interest in deer farming which kicked-off with an on-farm story in 2011.

I was comfortable talking the talk about sheep and cattle but knew diddly squat about deer. I've been learning about them and the people who farm, research, sell, process and market venison, velvet and co-products ever since. I soon discovered that if you're keen and interested there are people across the industry happy

to explain and share their insights and knowledge. Adding to my understanding was the lengthy process of researching and writing *In Hindsight: 50 years of deer farming in NZ* published late last year.

The DNA of deer farming is different from the other pastoral sectors I write about. The entrepreneurial, collaborative, proactive thinking and action are defining traits that we as an industry must keep nurturing. I see this publication as the perfect platform from which to do this and look forward to doing so. ■



He said deer research always had some core funding and ad hoc industry contributions. Then from the mid 1990s more formalised deer industry funding was added to the mix through Velvet Antler Research New Zealand (VARNZ), and from 2000 through DEEResearch (since replaced by the innovation framework and Deer Science for Success). This fitted the Government's desire for more partnerships and cofunding for research.



Bryan Thompson with one of the home-built GPS units.

That was a tumultuous period, "but we survived it well".

The early deer research work into areas like reproductive physiology was "pretty basic", but led to development by others of embryo transfer and AI technologies. "We had to convince farmers why it was important to understand the basics first, like deer endocrinology."

He was proud that the deer industry was always an early adopter of new technology such as AI, a momentum that was continued by the Passion2Profit programme.



X marks the spot – Geoff Asher explains research directions over the years at Invermay.

On the genetics side it was basic research using Père David hybrids that led the way to gene mapping in red deer, something that's taken for granted today. Asher said services like DNA parentage testing and measuring inbreeding wouldn't have been possible without that early work. The Invermay genetics database that started in 1990 was still a foundation for Deer Select today, he said. Sire referencing and then the Deer Progeny Test from 2011 also contributed to Deer Select, he added.

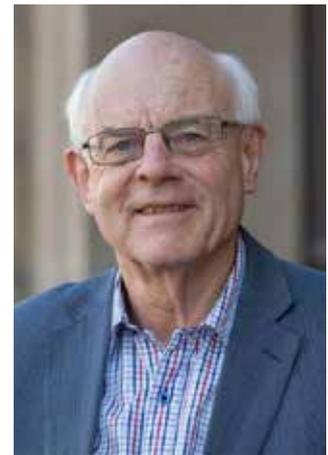
Peter Fennessy: Nutrition early focus

Peter Fennessy, who joined the deer team at Invermay in 1975, recalled that nutrition was an important research focus, as well as velvet antler. An early highlight was a trip to China in 1981 when a group of seven, led by the late Bernard Pinney, was "blown away" by the scale of the velvet antler business there. "That's where the design of the first deer crush came from."

Reproduction was another important focus, as was welfare and the development of Recervyl by Colin Mackintosh (a reversal agent

for Rompun). "We also realised we could learn a lot from people who studied wild deer, so we hosted the first World Deer Biology Conference in 1983.

Fennessy paid tribute to the foresight of pioneers like Tim Wallis and Peter Elworthy, who were strong supporters of early deer research. Another innovation that's now taken for granted was the inverted deer dressing method, developed at the Invermay research abattoir (now a Duncan NZ plant), to get over the problem of carcass contamination during dressing.



Peter Fennessy: deer nutrition was an important early focus.

Getting on top of Tb and Johne's

Frank Griffin gave yet more examples of the deer industry and researchers collaborating to nut out a problem affecting farmed deer. In the case of bovine Tb, it started with a \$5,000 grant from the Southland DFA, and then much bigger grants from James Innes to help tackle both Tb and stress.



Frank Griffin: Collaboration with industry yielded research benefits.

In the search for a reliable Tb test for deer he said that

"instead of looking for a simple solution to a complex problem, we looked for a few little solutions and then put them together".

Studying immune responses to Tb was a "minefield", he said. But by looking at a few different aspects of an animal's response, you could get a more accurate view of its actual Tb status. Griffin said their modelling and research revealed that resistance or susceptibility to Tb was strongly heritable, as was resilience.

Griffin said apparent Tb in a Southland herd showed up Johne's disease and by developing a reliable test it was possible to reduce incidence in a deer herd very quickly through testing and culling.

He recalled the big breakthrough in Johne's work made possible

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Invermay 50: continued

by the good bloodline records at Peel Forest Estate. These helped identify distinct bloodlines that are either strongly susceptible or resistant to Johnhe's. It was now possible to map the relevant genes for these animals and find markers for susceptibility or resilience to Johnhe's.

"By doing a whole lot of ordinary things, you can achieve the extraordinary," he concluded.

Good keen antler man

Jimmy Suttie came to Invermay in 1981 as a post-doctoral student, staying on from 1984 in a permanent role, until 2011. After AgResearch was formed in 1992 he became a national science leader looking after deer growth and the deer antler programme. This led to the collaboration, VARNZ, during a time of big expansion in antler research. Through this partnership research focused on antler composition and mechanisms, and velvet efficacy.

A spinoff company, Bioproducts started making products from velvet antler and bone. Suttie explained the velvet research was moved into a food science group in 1999, which is where he stayed until leaving AgResearch in 2011.

Suttie, who joined the day via video link, said it was great to be part of an international team studying deer velvet. The World Deer Biology Conference in Dunedin in 1983 was "the best" and helped put Invermay on the map as a world centre for deer research. "Being part of that team was fantastic."

He said the close working relationship with the Game Industry Board and then DINZ was unique to the deer industry. "Other industry bodies don't have such a close relationship."

Recognition that deer aren't just versions of sheep or cattle and have a unique biology was important, and helped get the industry established. "Much of what was done at Invermay in that period has set the blueprint for deer farming in other parts of the world too."

Suttie said another big achievement from the efficacy work done at Invermay was the acceptance of New Zealand velvet as a quality product. "In the '70s it had been seen as inferior to Russian or Chinese velvet."

He said there were many threads to the great contribution to the deer industry running through Invermay, including the early fundamental biology work of Peter Fennesy on feeding, and Geoff Asher's reproductive physiology work. Several PhD students had made a big impact also, including Chunyi Li, who has gone on to become a world expert in velvet growth mechanisms. His own colleagues such as Ian Corson and Stephen Haines had also made great contributions, he said. Chairing an international antler science meeting in Queenstown in 2004 was another great career highlight, he concluded.



Jimmy Suttie, photographed at the 2003 deer industry conference, where he was honoured with the Deer Industry Award.

Career traversed big deer disease challenges

Veterinarian and scientist **Colin Mackintosh** was at the sharp end of industry efforts to tackle most of the significant diseases that affect deer during his 35 years at Invermay from 1981 to 2016.

Like other speakers before him, he was quick to highlight the great team culture that enabled such progress. This teamwork was not just with AgResearch colleagues like Bryce Buddle and Geoff de Lisle but also Frank Griffin and his team, Peter Wilson at Massey, at the animal health lab staff like John Gill, Gary Clarke, Paul Mason and Marjorie Orr, industry deer vets like Noel Beatson, Ian Walker, John Hunter and Dave Lawrence, and most importantly, deer farmers.

One of the earliest challenges was the long time it took for stags to wake up after being given xylazine. Mackintosh's background research led him to a bark extract (Yohimbine), which was found to be effective as a reversal agent, not only for xylazine but also the Fentazine that was used in deer recovery work. Vet Gilbert van Reenen helped with a lot of the groundwork, Mackintosh said.

He said research into nerves in deer antler led to them being able to use a local anaesthetic for velvet removal.

Yersiniosis was the next big challenge and started emerging by the early 1980s. The bug that causes it, *Yersinia pseudotuberculosis*, was named that because some signs resembled Tb. Mackintosh found the bacterium was commonly present in healthy domestic animals, but disease was triggered by stress.

Working with Frank Griffin and Bryce Buddle, Mackintosh helped develop a killed vaccine for yersiniosis. "It wasn't 100 percent, but it reduced the severity of disease and losses in an outbreak. It was the first commercial vaccine for farmed deer."

Another highlight was the setting up of a small, leased possum-proof research farm in nearby Milton to study bovine Tb in deer. Mackintosh said it required good communication with neighbouring farms to reassure them their stock would be protected and explain the work they were doing. During the trial work there with deliberately infected weaners, a strong genetic link to Tb resistance was found.

In the 2000s attention turned to Johnhe's disease, chronic in sheep and cattle but with acute affects in deer, especially young animals. Mackintosh said they tested vaccines but although it gave some protection it sensitised animals when having a Tb skin test, so vaccination couldn't be recommended in breeding animals.

Parasite work at Invermay also made inroads. PhD student Marion Johnson, for example, found that lungworm in deer is a different lungworm species than the parasite that affects cattle. Mackintosh said the arrival of pour-on anthelmintics was a boon for parasite control for 20–25 years, but resistance was developing and new solutions were needed.

He said he'd enjoyed a rewarding career at Invermay. "I've had a ball, working with a fantastic team of people."

Gala dinner

Tony Pearse, who spent 19 years at Invermay from 1983, then 20 years at DINZ as producer manager, was master of ceremonies at a gala dinner to mark the 50 years of deer science.

He started with a big shoutout to the many veterinarians who contributed to the quantum of research into deer over the fifty



Guests enjoyed a string of anecdotes from master of ceremonies, Tony Pearse (inset).

years. He then went on to entertain the crowd with anecdotes, one in particular involving Colin Mackintosh. Colin was known for his inventiveness, none more so than when he developed an artificial deer vagina to help collect semen from a particularly frisky stag on Tony's farm during the rut.

Tony was appalled to find he was to be doused in hind urine and act as courier for the device at the collection stage. But he's nothing if not brave and gamely completed the task with plenty of encouragement from Colin. The amorous stag did his bit, and the mission was accomplished with minimal damage to man or beast.

That was the first of a string of Tony's anecdotes about some of the ingenuity, fearlessness, surgeries and surprises involved with researching these special animals – and which had the crowd in stitches.

He also made special mention of Adam Whaanga who came to Invermay as a 16-year-old cadet and made a terrific contribution as he grew in confidence and climbed through the ranks – not only on the farm but also on the cricket pitch and squash court.

After dinner speakers included Jonathon Wallis and former Game Industry Board chair, Mike Pattison, who shared broad-ranging reminiscences of his time in the industry. Both of these talented industry figures spoke well of their reminiscences and vision for the future, rounding off a memorable well attended event as you'd expect, given the occasion and those present. ■



Not safe for work: Jonathon Wallis entertained the audience at the dinner with stories of some of the ingenious devices developed by his father in the pioneering days of the industry. These included this immobilising device that was connected to the helicopter battery – essentially a taser for deer (no longer in use).

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Branch chairs reconvene

NZDFA branch chairs met in Wellington on 13–14 October for their second in-person meeting of 2022, and what was effectively another industry mini conference. *Deer Industry News* Editor, **Phil Stewart**, sat in.

Special general meeting (SGM)

The one-and-a-half-day gathering started with a brief NZDFA SGM to tidy up the constitution. This included changing to gender-neutral references (chair, not chairman), removing references to postal ballots so voting can be done online, removing the reference to “casual” vacancies and allowing for appointments to fill a vacancy if there are no nominees.

It was noted that all incorporated societies will be expected to review their constitutions in the next few years. At that point it will be possible to extend nomination periods if none have been received.

The meeting was completed in 10 minutes.

Regional roundup

Most chairs reported it had been wet and cold with spring growth slow to come away. Some branches are planning to help fill the void that will be left if Advance Parties in their areas meet less often or stop after the end of MPI funding for the P2P. They are planning more activities such as field days or hybrid branch–Advance Party events. Velvet competitions remain as a significant activity for many. The Rising Stars event has risen again and will be hosted next year by the Waipa branch.

Poor returns for venison and uncertainty around emissions charging were the main issues focusing the minds of branch members. Some are unhappy about the structuring of the venison schedule, for example the 10-cent differential between stag and hind prices and the penalties for carcasses over 85 kg. One branch tabled a letter demanding more transparency from venison companies about the values attributed to the co-product components of each carcass.

Executive committee member Mark McCoard said they shared these frustrations and had conveyed these to DINZ and the venison companies. “Keep talking to us year-round about your concerns – not just at the branch chairs’ meetings.”

Many chairs shared concerns about the gradual decline in the hind breeding herd and were keen to see a boost in schedule prices to inject some positivity back into the venison industry. One Advance Party had lost half of its members, who had left the deer industry.



NZDFA Executive Committee member Karen Middelberg addresses the branch chairs. (Photo: Ali Spencer)

A number commented that the pandemic had put the brakes on a lot of branch activities.

Some were concerned about ongoing risks to the velvet industry if any animal welfare issues blew up, and urged DFA members to “front foot” the issue.

Velvet report

DINZ manager markets, Rhys Griffiths told branch chairs there was more velvet remaining unprocessed in China than in

Fallow deer pioneer remembered

Ernie Hazlehurst died at his home in Matamata on 21 July, aged 80. **Geoff Asher** recalls this deer industry identity.

I FIRST MET Ernie and Leonie in the early 1980s when starting my science career at Ruakura Agricultural Centre.

My work was focused on farmed fallow deer and I recall first bumping into Ernie at a fallow farmers’ annual meeting.

He showed a strong interest in the scientific work, and he and Leonie offered up their herd for research quite early on. Probably the most memorable work was the earliest-ever studies on artificial insemination of fallow. The Hazelhursts’ herd, and that of another Matamata fallow farmer, Terry Bellamy, were the first commercial herds to be AI’ed, around 1987. This was repeated over several subsequent years.

In about 1990, Ernie and Leonie took on responsibility for establishing a fallow deer sire-referencing project on their farm, in order for the emerging industry to get a handle on genetic progress. This was an enormous feat, and a world first for the species. Ernie really put his heart and soul into it.

Ernie and Leonie also became great friends, and I often brought my oldest son Jeremy (then around 6–7 years old) out to their farm to go spotlighting possums.

They were very influential friends during my time at Ruakura and Ernie was a mentor with sage advice for me as I struggled through early career issues.

Unfortunately, as I was transferred down to Invermay near Dunedin, in 1993, I gradually lost contact with a lot of people I’d met up north. We had the occasional phone catch-up, but Ernie and Leonie retired from mainstream farming and spent a lot of time overseas. We kind of drifted apart for a while, but I never forgot our friendship.

Ernie was one of the true good guys we get to occasionally meet in our journey through life. ■

previous years, but it wasn't an insurmountable volume. Conditions in China were causing some headaches – for example the China Deer Velvet Coalition's Felix Shen had travel restricted thanks to the frequent lockdowns there.

He said that while great innovation was continuing in the Korean healthy food sector, a new generation was also modernising the Korean Medicine Doctor segment.

A newer player, Hanpure, was bringing new technology and streamlined communications to transactions with consumers.

Griffiths said bespoke prescriptions were made up, with the part of the antler specified by the Oriental medicine doctor, mixed with other herbal ingredients. The ingredients are processed and then packaged up with colour coding to indicate the content and stamped with the client's name. The package is then shipped very quickly to the client's home.

Hanpure's director, Alex Chung, has a Chinese business partner and uses only New Zealand deer velvet, Griffiths said. The company will become to the traditional medicine sector what KGC is to the healthy food business. Chung has been here and wants to "proudly promote" the New Zealand origin of the velvet they use.

He noted that at the recent field day at Forest Road Farm to celebrate Grant and Sally Charteris's Elworthy award, there were five links in the velvet supply chain in attendance: the growers, the exporter, the importer, the manufacturer (Dr GyongJai Lee, SP Corporation, award sponsor) and the marketer.

In an aside, he said that according to some velvet importers, Korean customs officials had agreed that bottom tynes cut off frozen velvet and imported separately would be deemed as processed, thus giving a 10 percent tariff advantage.

Griffiths was concerned that people confused the terms "healthy food" (the segment that New Zealand velvet is active in) and "healthy functional food". The latter involves health claims and is closely regulated. "We are also interested in this category as research continues; according to some media articles, one or two companies are looking to register products with a healthy functional food claim," he said.

He urged producers to maintain close links with their buyers, and work with those velvet operators who are investing in the industry.

While DINZ's efforts had been mainly on a business-to-business level, there were now also efforts to connect directly with



Rhys Griffiths: Keep in close contact with your buyers.

consumers, Griffiths reported. For example, through the generous support from NZTE Seoul, four "beach-head" workshops aiming to better connect with Korean consumers were held. Alpine Deer Group, PGG Wrightson, Provelco and CK Import Export provided input into the initiative.

Beyond the key markets of Korea and China, there was also growth potential in countries like Taiwan, Vietnam and Japan. A campaign through KGC in Taiwan for its Cheon Nok product had shown significant increase in sales growth over the last 12 months, he said. Markets in Japan and Vietnam would be a longer-term prospect.

There had been no market backlash against Russian velvet in the shadow of its invasion of Ukraine, but they did face logistical challenges getting velvet into markets.

Griffiths said too steep an increase in velvet prices could deter investment in research and markets, so steady growth was preferable.

See also updated velvet report on page 11 of this issue.

Emissions reduction: It's complicated

DINZ chair, **Mandy Bell** introduced a session on progress towards an emissions pricing system. She said the picture is constantly changing but doing nothing about emissions from agriculture was not an option.

While there were problems with the current proposals for farming – especially around sequestration and availability of mitigations – the DINZ board had agreed to stay in the He Waka Eke Noa (HWEN) partnership and present a united front (see box below for update).

DINZ had also engaged with the Food and Fibre Leaders' Forum, chaired by Mike Petersen. "It's a good, positive space," she said. The group had met with the Prime Minister and Ministers O'Connor and Shaw. A positive from this engagement was the government now had a clearer picture of the potential impact of a pricing system on the sheep, beef and deer sector.

The challenge was to find a just transition when there were limited options for mitigations, Bell said.

She said the DINZ board was well connected to the discussions through Jacqueline Rowarth's membership of the DairyNZ board, and Gerard Hickey's membership of the Meat Industry Association. Rowarth noted that New Zealand had so far escaped any imposition of carbon taxes under Free Trade Agreements. She suspected that the responsible government ministers, as well as the Green Party and Greenpeace would be happy for the HWEN partnership and emissions pricing system to "blow up" so that agriculture could then be put into the emissions trading scheme (ETS).



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Branch chairs: continued

Bell said the Government had given agriculture what it wanted for the way emissions are calculated (the split-gas approach), but they objected to the way pricing is calculated. Sequestration is a sticking point. Bell said incorporating all sequestration into the ETS in a just way was too bureaucratic and cumbersome, so there needed to be an on-farm calculator available or a simplified ETS-like arrangement.

It was also important that the methane price doesn't undermine the viability of deer farming, while pricing must reflect the availability of mitigations. Where there was neither access to mitigations, nor feasible sequestration, there must be levy relief, Bell said. The Government had landed somewhere in the middle on sequestration proposals, meaning no-one was happy at the moment.

Martin Workman, a chief adviser with the Ministry for the Environment and Dr **Fleur Francois**, manager, on-farm mitigation and inventory, MPI, joined the meeting.

Workman said it was important to the Government that farms remained viable. While it was committed to a 2025 start, the date might be shifted from 1 January to 1 July to fit in with the farm financial year.

On sequestration he said the Government wanted to start with a fairly simple system for measurement, then progressively add categories as the science develops. While the HWEN partnership wanted to recognise shelter belts and smaller pine blocks over time, this needed to be manageable and worth the administration time required to manage it.

Francois said price setting for methane and nitrous oxide was difficult, but the key thing was getting the process right. While government ministers wanted to be sure methane reduction targets were met, they also wanted to factor in economic and socioeconomic effects.

Another issue to be resolved was whether emissions pricing for fertiliser was calculated and paid for at importer level (favoured by the Climate Change Commission), or whether it should be worked out at farm level based on actual usage (favoured by the HWEN partnership).

Emissions Q+A session

There was a constructive Q+A session getting down into some of the thornier issues concerning deer farmers.

How will costs be handled?

The more mitigations that are available, the more money from emissions payments will be needed for administration, but most will be channelled into research to develop mitigations and incentives such as for low-emissions genetics. Credit for mitigations like genetics will be offset against emissions charges.

Will there be a lot of data collection needed?

It should be no more than the data you collect for tax purposes.

There are limited mitigation options for deer farming – how will you ensure this won't force people out of business?

Workman said the Government needs to see how help can be provided while mitigations are still being developed. That said, the system still needs to deliver lower emissions overall.

My district plan says I can't plant trees. What are my options?

That comes down to available mitigation options and transitional assistance. Minister Shaw is keen on incentives for enhancing biodiversity values. These should be a benefit, not a liability.



Fleur Francois and Martin Workman take questions during a constructive session on greenhouse gas emissions.

Will work that's already been done on farm be recognised?

Yes, but data will need to be provided to support that.

If the whole sector can meet emissions targets overall but deer can't because of the limited options for us, will that be acceptable?

Yes, the Government wants to be as fair as possible.

Please define 'transition'

It's not about forcing a change in land use. The transition needed is towards a system where you have effective mitigations available.

Carbon farming is already having negative impacts through pests, weeds, fire risks and impacts on rural businesses. Who is responsible for the impacts on rural communities?

Workman replied that Minister Shaw is concerned about negative impacts on rural communities. MPI has an office of rural communities and Damien O'Connor is the minister responsible.

How accurate is the model being used for red meat production? Cows are milked daily but red meat animals are killed just once!

Francois said that was acknowledged as an issue and they wanted to hear ideas from farmers on how best to do this and accurately estimate emissions from red meat animals. (Jamie Ward noted that it's relatively simple to know the emissions from an animal if you know its lifespan and amount of dry matter consumed.)

Workman added that they wanted to focus on mitigation, not just cutting production. He conceded this is easier with sheep than deer at present. Francois added that MPI had done its own modelling to assess the likely "emissions leakage" to overseas production. "We want to avoid unintended consequences," she said.

In the case of a lessee, who has access to the mitigations if the landowner is claiming carbon credits?

MPI thinks the business owner should get those benefits, but this would need to be agreed with the landowner.

Will the levies paid by deer farmers be channelled to research on mitigations for deer?

That's not decided yet, but an oversight committee will make recommendations on where funds are directed, e.g., to work on low emissions forages or feed additives.

Francois noted that MPI keeps tabs on the greenhouse gas inventory. She said some projections show emissions benefits from other policies such as the essential freshwater package.

Feds step back from HWEN response

At the time of writing (mid-November) the HWEN partners submitted their response to the government proposals for emissions pricing.

The HWEN submission recommends changes to price setting, governance and transitional arrangements that would see decision-making on emissions pricing balance the socio-economic impacts on the primary sector and wider economy with emissions reductions.

It notes that the government proposals as they stand are not acceptable to the HWEN partners or the farmers and growers they represent.

The submission says partners remain committed to working in good faith with government and Māori to design a practical cost-effective farm level system for enabling the agricultural sector to play its part in responding to climate change.

Of the 11 HWEN partners, Federated Farmers was the only one to not sign up to the joint submission, something described as “disappointing” by independent HWEN chair, Sarah Paterson. DINZ was among the 10 partners to support the submission.

To see the submission in full: <https://bit.ly/3ApsBqK>

Venison report

Peter Robinson, Silver Fern Farms reported that the European chilled season had a slow start but by mid-October things were picking up. He said demand for venison, like other premium products, had been affected by high inflation and some consumers had “traded down” to less expensive alternatives.

Silver Fern Farms was still actively promoting venison in Europe through direct advertising, joint promotions with in-market partners and social media.

Nigel Jones, Alliance Group, said the company was trying to create sustainable value growth for venison in China and had been working hard in that market as well as in the United States. Covid lockdowns in China had slowed progress somewhat.

Alliance had developed a venison hot pot dish with in-market partner Grand Farms in China. Jones said this was a good use for a part of the carcass that achieved lower value in Europe and was part of a push to get all components into markets where they could realise the highest value. Work like this will accelerate once foodservice opens back up in China. Other products include a premium cubed venison and a terrine that uses venison as its “hero” ingredient.

Jones said Alliance was shortly adding venison to its “Hand Picked” range, completing a portfolio of premium products.

John Sadler, Mountain River Venison, updated branch chairs on their work in the United States through partner, Force of Nature. The latest innovation was venison for a “Hopdoddy” burger through 35 US outlets (Hopdoddy is a portmanteau for hop flavours combined with a Scottish term for Angus cattle). Mountain River will be supplying 2.5 tonnes of venison, enough for about 14,000 burgers.

The venison version of a Hopdoddy burger is being marketed as an “ancestral blend”. It includes heart and liver (haggis anyone?) in a move towards more sustainable consumption that ensures nothing is wasted. Sadler said Force of Nature practises regenerative agriculture and favours grass-fed, pasture-raised

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Branch chairs: continued

animals farmed in a wildlife-friendly environment. Force of Nature sells venison through its “Sprout” stores. Their products (apart from New Zealand venison) are promoted as “local” and they have big social media presence.

Sadler said the Cervena® appellation still has value in foodservice when chefs understand the story around the standards for things like age of animal, transport, processing and so on.

He said the Arby’s venison burger promotion a few years ago was “a bit of a show” and a great promotion, but the chain was just too big to supply enough venison ongoing.

Gerard Hickey, Firstlight Venison, acknowledged that farmers need to be paid more for venison, but to achieve this “we need to move away from Europe”. That market was too cyclical and seasonal and a solution was needed especially to find better value for the leg, which makes up 53 percent of the carcass (Cervena is mainly middles).

Hickey said fitting into European market demands means we kill when we don’t want to.

The US market was providing some relief, first through premium ground venison, but transitioning to leg medallions. There was also potential in sub charcuterie with Pastramis, cooked and sliced meats.

He said the venison industry needed a third leg to the venison stool, with markets that aren’t so seasonal. Europe’s share of our venison exports fell from 58 percent in 2021 to 47 percent this year, which was a good sign. “But we should avoid rushing back to Europe when there’s a recovery there.”

VelTrak: Farm of Origin trial

Rob Gregory, DINZ general manager quality assurance, told branch chairs that this season’s VelTrak labels have an improved design and better adhesive, which should overcome the problems experienced last season with labels coming off.

They had also simplified the Velvet Status Declaration form and overhauled the tag scanner interface, making it easier for buyers to use.

There was also to be a trial for a system to help people promote their velvet through “Farm of Origin” assurance. This is a voluntary value-added option for people who want to use VelTrak tagging to identify product in the marketplace as coming from their farm. Gregory said it was likely to attract interest only from a minority, but could be important for some.

The Farm of Origin concept is being trialled this season by one processor and one importer. “It’s up to the companies to decide how they can use this.” Gregory said that for Farm of Origin labelling to work, the velvet must go through a registered packhouse. It will allow the velvet importer to see which farms its velvet came from where both the farm and the processor have opted into Farm of Origin. Gregory stressed that a farm will be able to opt in or out of the labelling at any time.



Graham Peck, South Canterbury/North Otago branch (with microphone), poses a question during the meeting.

Science update

Jamie Ward, AgResearch’s programme leader, Deer Science for Success, gave branch chairs a run through on science activity.

He said science delivery was moving to a “pipeline” approach with greater emphasis on final applications for the research, rather than the projects themselves. Two new high priority areas that had been identified were velvet (quality, attributes, welfare, timing, biological activity), and greenhouse gasses. He said the best projects were the ones that featured co-design, with the partners in the innovation steering groups working together through the whole process.

Ward said the groups were still not functioning as well as they could, something that couldn’t be blamed entirely on Covid disruptions.

Core projects underway:

- Programme management
- Capability development
- Tomorrow’s deer
- Deer Select
- Te Aō Māori in deer science innovation.

New projects:

- Variability of immune enhancement and functionality of the SAT and SANT grades (due for completion in 2023)
- Genetic knowledge accelerator: studying ways to increase genetics knowledge and uptake of available tools (a summer intern will be interviewing farmers at 2022/23 sire sales).
- Antler removal and welfare (including better understanding of post-velvetting bleeding control)
- Emissions: fundamental research to better understand methane emissions from deer, how to measure them and options for reducing these.

Projects completed/completing in 2022:

- **Penside diagnosis of lungworm:** following up the Learning Phase, metabolites in the saliva of deer indicating infection have been found. The next step will be to find a reliable way of detecting and using these for routine penside diagnosis.
- **Metabolomic profiles of deer grazing different forage types:** Deer research at Lincoln has “reclaimed” some space previously used for sheep and cattle work. The three forage types are ryegrass/clover; a functionally diverse mix including ryegrass, clovers, lucerne and herbs; and a regenerative agriculture mix of 23 species. This work will explore the effects of different forage types on health, stress and product quality.
- **Angular limb deformity:** prevalence, welfare impacts and possible causes (mainly affects young stags in high-performing velvet or stud herds). Prevalence generally low but can be up to 10 percent; possibly due to fast growth affecting growth plates; no clear link to copper.
- **Velvet antler anti-fatigue function:** using an animal model to investigate possible health benefits of velvet reducing fatigue and stress.



Jamie Ward: Co-design a key feature of successful programmes.

Coming up:

- Impact of deer on **hill and high country waterways**: Final analysis due 2024.
- **Across-breed connectedness**: completing 2023. This will provide across-breed and across-herd connections to support Deer Select.

Update to Deer Code of Welfare

Rob Gregory urged branch chairs to read the draft code and make submissions (these have since closed). Both DINZ and NZDFA were also submitting, but Gregory said it was important for perceptions that plenty of farmers also contributed off their own bat.

The DINZ submission picked up on a quite a few issues, such as the (unwise) requirement to remove bullied animals and put them in a new mob – something that would likely make matters worse. A requirement for “environmental complexity” in the draft code was also queried.

Gregory said shade and shelter was one of the biggest concerns for farmed livestock and deer weren’t immune from this. He said it’s likely NAWAC will be paying close attention to this aspect of welfare.

DINZ had also noted other requirements in the new code, suggesting some of them become recommendations to give some flexibility according to circumstances – for example, the 12-week minimum for age at weaning. “This can be necessary and easily done in situations such as a drought,” Gregory said.

OSPRI and NAIT

Mark Neill, chief adviser disease management, OSPRI said the 24 Tb-infected herds at 30 June was the lowest number ever recorded (by 6 October it had ticked up to 25 herds). There were no infected deer herds.

He said there was still an area of more than 6 million hectares to clear of Tb in wildlife, but they were on track to achieve that by 2040, and to eliminate Tb altogether by 2055.

It was unlikely that whole herds would be liquidated in New Zealand unless the prevalence within the herd was very high. Besides, while Tb was still present in wildlife, eliminating herds with infected animals was not so effective, he said.

On the current outbreak in Hawke’s Bay, where there has been some ill feeling about a landowner refusing permission for aerial 1080 control, Neill assured the audience that “we do have access to all the areas we need to for vector control around this cluster”. Some of this would be ground based.

On testing, he said farms in low-risk (surveillance) areas would now only be contacted for a test if they had bought in animals from a risk area.

Kevin Forward, head of traceability with NAIT, said the deer industry’s contribution to the system was lifting from \$120,000 to \$249,000, via levies.

Forward said the new MyOSPRI portal was being rolled out between now and next year and has replaced the eASD. The first stage is to create ASDs for farm-to-farm movements and also farm-to-processor movements. Functionality would be progressively added and a “new NAIT” would be created from mid 2023.

NAIT was created with diseases like foot and mouth disease in mind, he said. That disease moves very fast, which is why

recording of movements also needs to be prompt (less than 48 hours). Currently, only 58 percent of movements are recorded by that deadline, and they wanted that lifted to at least 80 percent.

Sheep were still not candidates for NAIT tagging, but the system can still be used to create ASDs, he said. OSPRI wants the proportion of all animals registered on NAIT before their first movement off farm to lift from the current 91 percent to 98 percent. “Twelve-to-fifteen thousand unregistered animals move each week, so we need to improve,” he said.

Tb and *M. bovis* outbreaks had exposed some bad mismatches between NAIT records and actual on-farm animal numbers.



Have national conferences like this one in Invercargill last year had their day?

The future of conferences

DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat told the meeting the era of national two-day deer conferences followed by a farm field day may have passed. The series of DINZ roadshows this year gave better value and engaged more farmers than a single annual conference. Regional events may be the future, he said, but people’s ideas on what to do from now on were needed.

“It’s also still good to have whole-industry events too, so perhaps we could look at a combined technical workshop, awards dinner and DFA annual general meeting at national level every second year with awards included with roadshows in the ‘off’ years.”

He said there was enthusiasm for a 50th anniversary conference for DFA in Queenstown in 2025 (the 25th was held there in 2000).

Justin Stevens also asked for ideas from DFA members on what benefits they would like to get from their membership.

Priorities, priorities

The branch chairs workshopped their priorities for the short term (0–2 years) and medium term (2–5 years). It was a full shopping list, including:

- more sustainable venison prices and fairer schedule (no stag/hind differential)
- venison to be a strong industry in its own right and not a “co-product”

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Branch chairs: continued



DINZ manager farm performance, Phil McKenzie, helping branch chairs workshop ideas for DINZ priorities in the near future.

- options for methane mitigation to achieve the 10% reduction target
- better value for velvetting stags
- a good successor for P2P
- more leveraged research funding
- reversing the declining numbers of deer and deer farms
- bring more young people into the industry
- clarity around indoor systems
- higher percentage of velvet going to the healthy functional food sector
- continue to engage and educate regulators and legislators
- promote the image of farmed deer and the industry. ■

2022 industry awards

Three awards were announced at the branch chairs' dinner in Wellington on 13 October.

Deer Industry Award: Ron Schroeder

Stock agent Ron Schroeder was praised for almost 50 years of contributions, acting as matchmaker for buyers and sellers and handling thousands of deer deals over his career. He has also been a staunch supporter of DFA and DINZ events and, through his widespread contacts, has kept a finger on the pulse of the industry.



Matuschka award judge Tony Pearce (left) presents the award to Ron Schroeder. (Photo: Ali Spencer)

The judges also noted Ron's advocacy for quality assurance in the stock and station industry.

He is said to "love everything" about deer. Judges commented that Ron "farms them, buys and sells them, hunts them, eats them and probably dreams about them. He roars like a deer and some say he even looks like a deer."

NZDFA Life Membership: Paddy and Barbara Boyd

The Boyds have made a huge contribution to the deer industry and are synonymous with Haldon Station where Paddy has worked for decades as manager, first with the Innes family and then the Klissers. Paddy deservedly received the Deer Industry Award in 2014 and has given his time generously over a long period, being involved in the Tb Free Committee, NVSB, Passion2Profit Advisory Group and Selection and Appointments Panel among others.

He was praised for his common-sense approach and deep knowledge of the industry. During his time on the NVSB, he helped usher in significant changes to the velvet industry, including the Regulated Control Scheme and VelTrak.

Much of Paddy's early career was dedicated to eradicating Tb from Haldon Station.

In more recent times he oversaw the participation of Haldon Station in the Deer Progeny Test, the benefits of which are still flowing through the industry.

Throughout his career at Haldon Station, he's championed the deer, sheep and beef industries through various media, both in



From left: Paddy and Barb Boyd with NZDFA chair Justin Stevens and executive committee member Jamie Ward. (Photo: Ali Spencer)

New Zealand and overseas. The Boyds have been welcoming hosts to countless visitors, including a Next Generation programme.

Matuschka Award: Barry Mackintosh

Barry Mackintosh has diligently served the Waikato branch of NZDFA for about 40 years. He's described as a "quiet" velvet antler ambassador and venison promoter.

His citation for the award notes that Barry "can always be relied on to initiate, organise and support" local branch activities. "Barry's vast knowledge, wisdom and large network of deer farmer and industry contacts have been invaluable."

He's also well respected in his Waikato district for strongly promoting local field days and other activities and being the "main man" on the food side. "With his culinary skills and butchery background there's always venison supplied and served."

As an agent for CK Import Export for over 20 years, his honesty and good communication skills have been invaluable. ■



Strong data underpins 2023 lineup

CLACHANBURN STATION IS gearing up for its 2023 on-farm elk and wapiti bull sale. The animals that go up for sale on 17 January at John and Mary Falconer's Maniototo property are the culmination of a process that started long before the deer were born. Sires were picked based on their performance and genetic traits, and matched with the right cows.

They are constantly assessed throughout their first three years. From their first weight at tagging in March, through eye muscle scanning and velvetting, they need to continually perform to hold their place in the sale mob. Sires for the venison industry are bred for a variety of traits: growth rates, actual weights, parasite resistance and eye muscle area as well as temperament and resilience. Add to that a head of velvet to help pay for their keep.

"Things are easier if you are only trying to improve one or two things, but with venison sires we're looking at numerous traits.



This is harder, but we've made impressive progress across the board," John says.

He uses a number of tools to help push the breeding programme forward. As well as weights and growth rates, the farm uses Carla testing to collect data on parasite resistance and does eye muscle area scanning. Clachanburn was one of the original elk studs on Deer Select, which provides estimated breeding values and should allow comparisons between different years and different farms.

"The system is pretty good for on-farm accuracy between mobs and years, but the pool of elk/wapiti is quite small, and the linkage is weak between many herds," John says. The Falconers have moved to improve this by bringing in sires, and two years ago they purchased the young bulls from Connemara stud when it closed. The last of those will be on sale this year alongside the Clachanburn bulls. They, too, have been subjected to rigorous assessment since arrival.

"As well as being weighed and velvetted, the bulls were fertility tested to ensure they are able to do the job!" John says. "It is pretty standard in the beef industry, but as far as we know we're the only elk stud to do it."

This is just one of the reasons the Falconers are confident they can be proud of the line-up of sale bulls that will be in the auction ring on 17 January.

- Article supplied

Last word from the CE

AS WE HAVE navigated the choppy waters of the past few years, the one thing I have not had to worry about was the quality of our industry magazine. With boundless energy, huge capacity for work and an almost magic ability to distil and clarify the key points from complex topics and discussions, **Phil Stewart** has consistently produced *Deer Industry News* on time, to budget and to our high expectations.

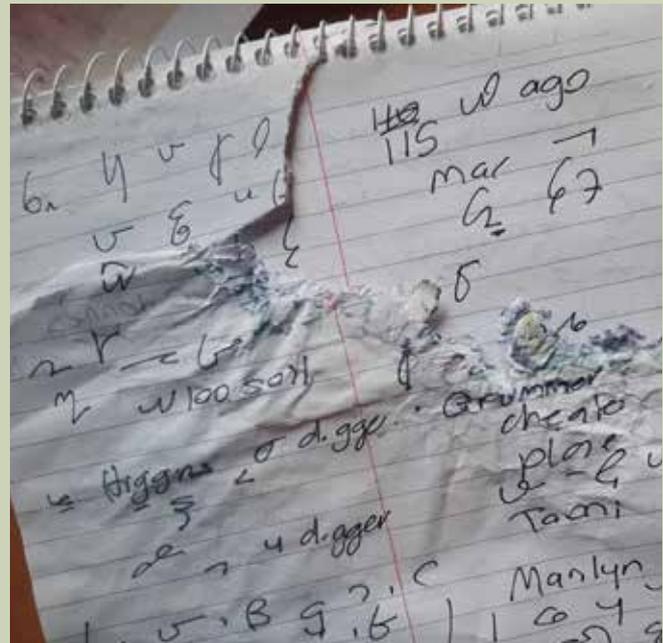
DINZ regularly seeks your views on the mood of the industry, the sources of information used to help make decisions and what services you value. *Deer Industry News* has consistently been rated the top source of information on deer farming, the best source of news about industry activities and prospects, and an essential component of what creates a common sense of ownership over our deer farming community. Phil's stewardship of the industry magazine has served this industry well, both for DINZ and the NZDFA, and for all our people who share an interest in deer farming and our great products.

I have enjoyed the long car journeys back from field days with Phil, discussing wide ranging topics of politics, culture and farming personalities, and while he is stepping aside from the editorship, I look forward to continuing to enjoy his company both with occasional pieces of work for DINZ, but also at social occasions around town.

Cheers Phil ■

– Innes Moffat, CEO, Deer Industry New Zealand

Eating media for lunch



If you've been around deer long enough you'll know that they can get up to mischief as soon as you turn your back. A lower North Island journalist found this to her cost recently after leaving her reporter's notebook unattended for a short time while visiting a deer farm when researching an article. The offending deer had a good chew on her shorthand notes, but the journalist, who prefers to remain anonymous, assures *Deer Industry News* that the gist of her story still got through unscathed.



Clachanburn Seafire
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Clachanburn Skyfall
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Tombstone: 19kg at 5 years old
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competition. Over 20kg at 6yrs



Clachanburn Deer

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