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# Deer Industry News

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Cover photo: 2023 MSD/Allflex Photo Competition winner Gill Maclean with 'Curious'

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# Positive steps in China



As a niche product in a crowded protein marketplace, raising the profile and consumption of venison requires a long-term investment to build consumer loyalty and sustainable value for New Zealand farmers.

**INVESTING IN BUILDING** this long-term demand is a focus for Silver Fern Farms.

Having recently returned from China, it's been great to see our strategy in action as the team in Shanghai work to build the profile of venison among our foodservice and retail partners and beyond them to an increasing number of consumers.

Like many consumers around the world post-Covid, there is a growing cohort in China who are heavily focused on food as medicine with a scrutiny on what they eat to ensure everything they eat enhances their health.

In this context, the nutritional qualities of venison are proving to be a great stepping-stone to engage with consumers in China and getting them to try and buy our product. The next step is to build venison demand to a point where it becomes a regular part of their diet, as is starting to happen in the United States with our expanding ground venison retail programme.

What we are learning from that programme is how an introduction to venison through a ground product is driving consumer interest in other cuts, which will allow us to expand our retail range over the long-term.

The positive news is we are increasingly getting customers proactively contacting us about venison and its availability in China. This is what is driving a re-balancing of our global venison portfolio away from a heavy reliance on the European market, which gives the ability to build sustainable demand for venison and bring more stability to farmer returns.

While the global environment is tough at the moment, with consumers in China in particular slow to rebuild to their pre-Covid confidence, continuing to invest in building their understanding and awareness of venison remains a focus in that market. This means an emphasis on trade fairs, consumer tastings, promotions, chef education events, e-commerce promotion and branded retail programmes to build interest in venison and channels for those whose attention has been captured to find and purchase the product. While venison still remains a very small part of the protein set in China, these types of events are starting to build familiarity and consistent demand. Continuing to invest in them will be key to building sustainable demand for the product and a less volatile return to farmers over the long-term. ■

David Courtney  
Silver Fern Farms Chief Customer Officer

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## Fishy

Taieri flatheads such as the one in the hands of John and Mary Falconer’s son Charlie are found in only a few streams in Otago. Classified as ‘nationally vulnerable’, these cousins of whitebait have the same threat status as the great spotted kiwi. The rare native fish live in Stony Creek, a small stream that runs through the Falconers’ Clachanburn Station. The family are supporting the work of a local farmer-led catchment group to improve water quality and habitat of the stream in which the elusive fish live. Find out more about environmental management at Clachanburn on page 24.



## 100 not out

Almost 40 farming families from throughout the country received Century Farm awards at this year’s event held in mid-May at Lawrence, South Otago. The NZ Century Farm and Station Awards programme aims to recognise farming families who have owned and worked their land for 100 years or more. Since inception in 2005 more than 550 families have achieved official centenary or sesquicentenary award status. Deer farming recipients include the von Dadelszen family of Mangapurakau Station, Hawkes Bay. Find out more about the programme and the award application process at [www.centuryfarms.nz](http://www.centuryfarms.nz)



## Picture perfect

Gill Maclean has her sister to thank for winning the MSD Animal Health/Allflex Deer Industry Photo Competition. Unbeknown to Gill, her sister Dianne Allan (who farms with husband Peter, Maple Valley deer farm between Dipton and Balfour) entered seven of Gill’s photos taken on a visit to the Allan’s Southland farm late last year.

“I was surprised and thrilled,” Gill says of the win.

“I’ll definitely be taking Dianne out for lunch.”

Dianne runs a fallow deer herd and the winning shot ‘Curious’ – this issue’s front cover shot – is of an orphan fawn Mindy taken on



a mirrorless Canon R6 with a Canon EF 100 – 400mm lens.

Chief judge Anna Munro described the photo as a “seriously cute” portrait which perfectly projects the naivety and innocence of a young animal.

Gill, an enthusiastic member of the Southland Photographic society, also earned a Highly Commended award for ‘On the March’ capturing a group of fallow silhouetted on a ridge line with a moody sky backdrop. Both shots were taken in black and white.

“It was a choice I made to simplify things and take away any colour distractions.”

Photography has been a longtime passion, but Gill emphasizes “it’s just a hobby”. However, she’s an accomplished amateur winning last year’s Photographic Society of NZ Sony Exhibition. She’s also earned PSNZ Licentiate Honours, a first level internationally recognized award acknowledging photographic competence and artistry.



## Slash is cash, not trash

That was a controversial comment from Sir Ian Taylor as part of his conference keynote address. The New Zealander of the Year 2018 and founder of Animation Research Limited talked about the evolution of his unique business but also the missed opportunity from bio-forestry technology to transform plantation forestry biomass into biofuels, bio-chemicals and materials that can reduce the need for fossil fuels. He was supportive of Māori-Singapore-Taiwan company NZ Bio Forestry Ltd which had plans to establish forestry waste conversion facilities across the country.



## Good value or too cheap?

In a Q & A session following their AGM Donald Whyte asked how many hours a week the NZDFA executive members devoted to Association matters. When the answer of 20 hours came back Donald said that they were “too cheap” given the \$8000 honorarium they received. NZDFA chair Justin Stevens agreed and was quick to add that SAP members were even cheaper because they received nothing and were even better value. ■



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# Craig (Wiggy) Wiggins

## Stress Less

**AT THE ASHBURTON** conference Craig (Wiggy) Wiggins offered some practical tips and advice on dealing with stress. Wiggy has become a rural community advocate who walks and talks the topic of farmer mental health. Born and raised on a farm at Raetihi, he's forged a unique lifestyle and career evolved from his love of rodeo, and the use of a microphone. As well as taking on MC and commentator roles at many rural events he has become a prominent voice for farmer health and well-being, spearheading a number of nationwide programmes and initiatives through the Whatever with Wiggy Charitable Trust. These include farmer health and well-being checks in association with the Carr Family Foundation, Agri Connect which arranges mental health seminars for people involved in the rural community, and fundraising for people in need after a life-changing event.

When he's not out and about Wiggy lives with wife Annabelle and daughters Genevieve and Millie on 3Oha in mid-Canterbury which is just enough to give him a farming fix.

## At the conference you said that having time out was essential to avoid burnout and stress. What's your go to time-out activity?

I'm the Clerk of the Course for Harness Racing NZ at racing meets throughout Canterbury. I love the adrenaline rush and it takes me away from everyday stresses because when I'm in that role I have to be 100 percent focused on runaway horses.

## Not everyone can get off farm as regularly as they'd like. What's your advice if you find yourself in this situation?

Pack up a picnic and the family, head to a favourite spot on the farm and simply hang out.



## What's your four step approach for helping someone deal with stress and depression?

1. Connect: talk or phone them and chew the fat on what's going on in their life.
2. Hear them out: listen! Take the time to listen and hear what it is that might be dragging them down.
3. Uplift: assure them that their feelings are valid and you're on their team.
4. Reassure and refer: stick with them and if necessary, accompany them to a GP. I've done that about six times over the last six months and my role was to support them during and after the visit.

## You've become the advocate and go to person for rural mental health and well-being. How did it all start?

When Covid-19 hit it closed the gate on all of my speaking engagements. My whiteboard was wiped clean of MC roles and so on. The front gate was shut, and it was the same for farmers; they couldn't share the load and that's why I started 'Whatever with Wiggy'

## 'Whatever with Wiggy'?

[whateverwithwiggy.co.nz](http://whateverwithwiggy.co.nz)

Yes, it started as a Zoom meeting Facebook page in April 2020 with the idea of building connections within the rural community. The meetings were held every Thursday night. The first attracted 15 people and it built up to 80-plus. We had guest speakers including politicians, celebrities, and other farmer advocates and we talked about issues affecting rural communities ranging from Covid-19 to politics and mental health. Since then, it's become a registered charity, from which I've started local mid-Canterbury and nationwide initiatives.

## How did 'Lean on a Gate' come about?

I lost a young rodeo mate and soon after another good friend to suicide and it made me ask 'what are we missing' in our communities for this to be happening? The answer is connectedness and the aim of 'Lean on a Gate' is to take five minutes out of your day to ring a mate and check in, talk to a neighbour, family member, or colleague. Whether they have been having a rough time, or you just haven't spoke for a while, make time to ring them...now.

## What's on your whiteboard for the next 12 months?

Lots more Agri Connect, farmer support and community events to build resilient and supportive communities, and to make decision makers of our country aware of the collateral damage that poor policy making causes. ■

# Positive results with Cervidae Oral at Tumunui Deer

**TUMUNUI DEER FARM** manager Graham Birch is a big advocate of Nexan's Cervidae Oral triple combination drench.

"We need an effective oral drench that won't compromise the growth of our weaners and Cervidae Oral is delivering on both fronts," he says.

Tumunui Deer, in the central North Island near Rotorua is a venison, velvet and stud run alongside sheep and cattle based on two farms comprising 760 ha. The deer operation runs 1700 hinds, 300 velvet stags and finishes 2500 weaners annually.

Graham was quick on the uptake of Cervidae Oral following its release in September 2021 because of the single dose treatment, short withholding period of 28 days and effectiveness in controlling gastrointestinal parasites.

"We target the premium spring and pre-Christmas schedules with our weaners, so a short withholding period is absolutely crucial."

Cervidae Oral is a lot quicker and easier to use with no mixing of drenches required. Also, because it's specially formulated for deer, Graham has greater confidence in the effectiveness of the product. "We're not having to drench as often which is a big bonus because it's saving us time," he adds.

Cervidae Oral is a new tool, but not a silver bullet for parasite control in deer, Graham says. He is well aware of the need to preserve the efficacy of the product and does this by following the principles of parasite management. This has included, with advice from PGG Wrightson Technical Field Representative Dion Schreiber, the development of an integrated pasture management and grazing plan for Tumunui's various livestock classes to help reduce the internal parasite burden in young deer.

Cervidae Oral along with the broader integrated farm management approach is working for the young deer at Tumunui, Graham says.

"Having a thorough plan with the back-up of Cervidae Oral is helping us front foot parasite control in deer."

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# Long road to recovery

By Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

**THE UNRELENTING GRIND** of getting back on track is taking its toll on Cyclone Gabrielle affected farmers.

“Farmers are finding it bloody hard, and their well-being is a real concern. Gabrielle has been like another nail in the coffin for some,” deer agent, velvet buyer and deer farmer Keith Burden says.

He farms 1000 deer plus sheep and cattle on 507 ha alongside the Napier/Taupo road. The biggest problem in the aftermath was the underground water gouging of huge holes in the pumice country. It’s created a serious hazard of unstable land which collapses under the weight of stock and vehicles.

“We can’t get a fertiliser truck over the deer farm and there’s no way I’d ride a horse around here,” Burden says.

The underground gouging isn’t a huge problem on the 135 ha of moderate hill deer fenced country, but it is on the steeper hill and sheep grazing area where several have plummeted into deep holes from which they can’t escape. The risk is being reduced by caving in the holes with a digger, so stock have access in and out of slumped areas, but it’s slow going. Burden’s concern is that more rain will create more slips and cave-ins, and the holes will grow creating more underground waterways.

In the immediate aftermath a lot of the Burden’s deer escaped. Most have returned although some are still unaccounted for.

Like many other affected farmers Burden accessed the Ministry for Primary Industries \$10,000 grant, using it to replace property-access culverts.

Next on the to do list is the clearing of silt from the water spring that supplies stock water to a series of on farm dams.

Burden is trying to keep things in perspective and says the support and practical offers of help from NZDFA Hawke’s Bay branch members and individual farmers has been greatly appreciated.

“There’s a hell of a lot worse off than us, we’re lucky because our infrastructure is fine.”

NZDFA executive member Karen Middelberg says the ongoing wet weather is making it difficult for farmers to get on with the recovery job. Middelberg and husband Richard Hilson’s farm was not in the thick of the cyclone but there is still significant damage including a massive slip across an access track at the back of the farm, a blown out dam and a damaged bridge.

The recovery process was slow for farmers who were waiting for fencing supplies and suchlike, she says.

“It’s taking time, but some farmers are okay about waiting because they have other things to get on with....it’s going to be a long road and a long winter.”

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**“...it’s going to be a long road and a long winter.”**

Karen Middelberg

Gisborne Advance Party facilitator Nathan Twigley says fencing is the priority for deer farmers in the region but hampered by the shortage of diggers and skilled operators to use them. Most of the deer farmers he knew of have been affected in some way and were “chipping away” at repairs. The worst damage was not from Cyclone Gabrielle but the heavy rain about ten days later.

Twigley is farm manager of a 1500 ha sheep, beef and deer farm at Pehiri. The deer unit, running 1000 head is unscathed.

“We had slips in two paddocks but had shifted the deer beforehand.”

The \$118,500 pledged from the NZDFA auction will shortly be distributed to branches with badly hit farms in Kaipara, Poverty Bay, Hawke’s Bay, Taihape-Ruapehu and Central Regions, DINZ producer manager Lindsay Fung says.

“The branches will determine how best to use their allocations which may include assistance for individual farms and social events for the farming community.” ■



Slumped: water-logged pumice country on Keith Burden’s farm

# Conference 2023

## Lots to digest

By Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

**HOW TO TURN** challenges into opportunities provided plenty of food for thought at the 2023 conference.

There was lots to chew over given the many and varied conversations on how to flip the switch of challenge into opportunity across the deer industry. A side theme was how to build confidence and inspire investment.

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### There were many and varied conversations on how to flip the switch from challenge to opportunity.

Challenge hallmarked the conference narrative long before the almost 200 delegates sat down for the opening address at Hotel Ashburton on 10 May. Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) faced the difficult job of relocating the event at relatively short notice following the scuppering of the Hawke's Bay event branch in the wake of Cyclone Gabrielle. But DINZ producer manager Lindsay Fung and team with excellent support from the NZDFA's Canterbury-West Coast branch rose to the challenge delivering a first class act. Another win was the make up of the conference crowd with more than half of those attending farmers and, according to a show of hands, about one-third under the age of 45.



Time Out: A smoko break for NZDFA Taihape-Ruapehu members Andrew Peters (left) and Sean de Lacy (right) and Hawke's Bay member Evan Potter

The NZDFA 48th AGM (see page 22) preceded the state of the industry presentations by DINZ and marketers. During this first session NZDFA Canterbury-West Coast chair Lorna Humm and South Canterbury-North Otago chair Mark Tapley shared in brief their vision for the deer industry. Tapley, who manages Peel Forest Estate running 10,000 deer for venison, velvet and trophy production acknowledged the success of New Zealand velvet within the healthy functional food sector in China and South Korea. This was exciting and opened up huge potential in other Asian markets "but why stop there," he asked.

"If we could identify the health benefits and clinically prove and test them in Western medicine imagine the returns we could

unlock. We could be serving limitless markets world-wide."

Supplying an increased number of markets with a limited supply product would turn New Zealand velvet producers and marketers from price takers to price makers.

There were many challenges, but he was confident there were many product developments in the pipeline that would take the industry forward.

"I'd like to think that my children will look back and be thankful for our hard work and the vision we had... aren't we lucky to be farming such a diverse animal. I like to think of the velvet we sell as the equivalent of gold and venison the champagne."

Lorna Humm acknowledged the current challenges around producer returns and a diminishing venison supply, but said she was excited about the future. The opportunity was to diversify markets and income streams, evolve the supply chain, and reduce wastage.



Future forward: Mark Tapley and Lorna Humm shared their deer industry vision for the future.

"We see farmers leaning in to be in more control of their destiny and have more active involvement in the way our products are taken to market," she said.

Humm's vision was for cohesion and careful placement and marketing of venison along the lines of New Zealand Merino which had successfully grown markets and price premiums. But she said that any premium returns must filter along the chain to farmers.

"Higher returns equals growth. Growth equals confidence, stability, and the future of our industry. There's a lot to be positive about but we've got a lot of work to do."

The afternoon comprised three half hour rotational workshop sessions covering the topics of handling stress (see page 6) facilitated by Craig (Wiggy) Wiggins; Science Success in the deer industry facilitated by DINZ Science Policy manager Emil Murphy and AgResearch's Jamie Ward (see DINZ eNews May 2023); and Community engagement – what would you like to see, led by DINZ's environmental team of Megan McCall and Sara Elmes. The main message from this forum was that greater engagement with young people was needed, from school leavers, university graduates and young professionals.

Any concerns about flagging attention levels at the late afternoon session were well and truly laid to rest thanks to the engaging presentation skills of guest speaker Mark Adams (see page 15) and FMG-sponsored keynote speaker Sir Ian Taylor.

A brief reprieve and it was back to the Arrowsmith Room transformed from presentation auditorium to a Silver Fern Farms glammed up dining room with fine food to match. As well as the food, delegates dined out on engaging stories about the environmental, photography and coveted Matauschka and Deer Industry Award winners (see pages 18-20, 34-35.)



Fine dining: The Awards Dinner was sponsored by Silver Fern Farms.

The next morning's visit to Darryl and Lyn Butterick's sheep, beef and deer farm now back on track after being badly hit by the 2021 Ashburton floods (see page 28) was hopefully a timely morale booster to delegates from the Hawke's Bay. The farm tour rounded off with discussion and a lunch of Mountain River-supplied venison and Fairlie Bakehouse pies.

In summary Conference 2023 was an excellent event due to the well-pitched content and format. Congratulations to all concerned, you've created a new blueprint; your challenge and opportunity is to replicate and repeat! ■

## Fully focused

By Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

**INNES MOFFAT PROMISED** conference delegates a clear focus on core activities.

He said the 20,000 reduction in the hind herd over the 12 months until September 2022 and the further 20,000 reduction forecast for the September 2023 year would reduce DINZ income and, in line with the recently released Strategic Vision, had led to a reset and reprioritisation of some activities.

"Our levy is paid by you the farmers. We are very clear that everything we do needs to be in you, the farmers interests."

There would be a greater emphasis on advocacy and government relations, he said.



Clear-cut: Innes Moffat said DINZ activities were focussed on bolstering profit along the supply chain and building pride and confidence across the deer industry.

"He Waka Eke Noa, greenhouse gases, water quality, bio diversity, food safety and biosecurity issues will not go away and DINZ will work hard to make sure that the impacts of these proposed policy and regulations are understood by the government."

Market access and development was another priority area that DINZ would pursue with the continued lobbying of trade representatives, especially for smoother market access in the velvet and co-product sectors.

Enhancing and promoting good industry practice and quality assurance was ongoing and meant providing proof that the land, the people, and the deer they farmed were looked after in the right way in order to attract new capital and the next generation.

Investment would continue to build capability by funding science and technology to create on farm tools to add profit and productivity. Other investment areas were Advance Parties, environment groups and rural professional workshops. Also, funding would be directed at attracting new people to the industry, building on the past success of the NZDFA's Next Generation initiatives.

Research priorities included the identification of low methane emitting deer and deer farming systems, and superior genetics; development of farm systems for improved water quality; projects that would quantify and support velvet efficacy, and nutritional claims for venison; and best practice velvet removal.

In summary he said it was the industry's responsibility to invest for the future.

"As a deer industry we need to be investing in finding new revenue streams and systems to reduce costs. No one else will do this for us."

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**"Our levy is paid by you the farmers. We are very clear that everything we do needs to be in you, the farmers' interests."**

Innes Moffat

How to balance velvet and venison expenditure in line with reduced venison and increase velvet income was being addressed. That had led to stepping down DeerPro reporting, but not John's monitoring and management.

Cost cutting measures had impacted the DINZ team which would be moving to smaller and shared office space with Beef +Lamb New Zealand. There had also been the restructuring of roles to align expertise and resources to deliver what farmers needed. Moffat said DINZ was employing fewer people following the restructuring of some positions and departure of some staff. Rhys Griffith would take on a broader marketing role, relinquishing some of his velvet duties which would be covered with a new support position.

"We've got passionate staff committed to our industry. DINZ is up for the challenge of leading our industry into a confident future." ■

# The change game

By Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

**IN THE OPENING** address DINZ chair Mandy Bell was upfront about the challenges facing the deer industry. Change was being asked of farmers and exporters of quality food products; the speed of change was daunting but unlikely to stop. The push for change was in part due to Covid-19 along with Government policy and impending environmental compliance. The upshot over the last three to five years was fewer deer across the country as farmers destocked and diversified into other land uses to boost income.



**Well positioned:** Mandy Bell said the challenge was to make sure changes were made for the right reasons and positioned the deer industry for future social and market demands.

But change was not being driven only by the Government but rather wider society – consumers, special interest groups and advocates – both in New Zealand and the communities where our deer farmed products were exported. The deer industry had to work smarter and harder at satisfying and meeting these expectations through ongoing proof and assurance of good animal welfare and environmental stewardship, and connection with producers, Bell said.

Confused and contradictory government policy imposed without adequate thought, more frequent extreme weather events, rising input costs were some of the challenges that were eroding the confidence of farmers.

“We can turn this around, and it is going to take actions from everyone across the sector.”

Those broad actions were ensuring that the right deer were in the right place, with appropriate environmental management; good breeding, feeding and health programmes were in place to optimise hind production; leveraging levy funds alongside processor/marketer investment and government funding in new market development and growth; and a nose-to-tail plus co-product value maximisation approach.

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## “We can turn this around, and it is going to take action from everyone across the sector.”

Mandy Bell

“As a board we look across the whole value chain, from research needs, to breeding decisions, production, processing and marketing. We looked at what actions the industry can take to thrive in the future.”

Indicators of a thriving industry were higher prices, lower compliance costs, and confidence in future returns.

Bell reiterated that DINZ did not own the products or means of production or set the price but did influence actions across the value chain.

“Our role is to show leadership to guide good investment decisions that will improve returns for deer farming and protect the investment you have made in your deer farming business.” ■

# Keeping up with fast change in China

By Ali Spencer *Deer Industry News* writer

Already fast-moving, things are starting to accelerate in China now the borders have re-opened. New Zealand venison's sales teams are keenly starting to get out and about in the market.

The changes in how consumers buy red meat – through ecommerce, group buying and retail, that were starting to become apparent before Covid, “have only accelerated over the last three years,” noted Silver Fern Farms’ chief customer officer Dave Courtney, after returning from his first market visit post-Covid19 in March.

“The trends of convenience to buy and convenience to consume are clear and there is a real focus on healthy eating choices through nutritious food.”

Courtney said it was clear, at the time of that visit to the 24-strong team and its customers in Shanghai, that the lockdown had caused huge distress for the Shanghai population.

However, all the signs were that consumer confidence, and meat demand, was improving as life returned to normal in Shanghai and wider-China and the all-important foodservice channels were recovering, he said.

“Interest in venison has grown in China as our China team introduce the product to greater numbers. With the Covid restrictions fading, this work can now accelerate, which is really positive.”



**FAST MOVING:** Dave Courtney said that interest in the venison category was accelerating, and the company was committed to further investment.



**LOOKING GOOD:** Silver Fern Farm's Venison French Rack is a new product for Chinese supermarket Sam's Club.

However, while the economy and consumer confidence have continued to improve since then, it has not been “as fast as was expected,” he said. “The market remains sluggish, although demand for venison is relatively stable.”

According to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT), by April supply chains were rapidly improving, trade through ports was normalising and significant cost and risk were being reduced with the dropping of Covid19 cold chain checks by the China authorities.

Now they could get out and about, the Silver Fern Farms' Shanghai sales team was "buzzing", Courtney told the Deer Industry Awards dinner guests in May.

In late 2021, Silver Fern Farms, launched a very successful premium venison retail gift pack which sold over 6,000 items over the Christmas/Chinese New Year period (Deer Industry News, April-June 2022) through the upmarket supermarket Sam's Club. Over the same period in 2022-2023, a further 8,000 packs were sold.

Building on that success, this year the company added Venison French Rack and Venison Cubes to Sam's Club's winter range. Venison was also supplied seasonally to Dingdong Macai – an emerging Shanghai-based e-grocer – in the East and South China regions. Branded retail venison products were launched last November on JD.com, Hema and other high-end supermarkets, while venison jerky and patties have been introduced to consumers on Douyin (known as TikTok worldwide).

In addition, the company is undertaking a significant piece of market insight work to further refine where demand for venison sits in the market.

"This piece of work will further empower our China-based team to get out and tell the story of what deer farmers do here in New Zealand and resonate with a group of consumers who will see the value in the fantastic product you produce," Courtney told conference.

## Responding to trends and consumers

Companies like Silver Fern Farms and Alliance Group are responding to the market trends in China's new post-Covid-19 world: the move to digital and ecommerce channels, shifts to the big-box retailers and increasingly competitive Chinese food and beverage brands.

"China's a very complex market and we need to reshape the way we think about the entire value chain and work closely with our partners," Alliance sales manager Terry O'Connell told the recent deer industry conference audience. The co-operative has a 24-year relationship with its in-market partner Grand Farm.

Alliance Group and Grand Farm have spent a "significant amount of time and energy" on digital media in the market. This includes engaging with livestreaming social media influencers targeting increasingly health-conscious Chinese consumers, he explained.

"It resonates well with the younger generation looking for exciting and interesting options and "comes with a hefty price-tag," he added.

Pure South Venison is also promoted directly on Grand Farm's official WeChat channel. This gives a direct link to both business-



**INFORMING:** Terry O'Connell said educating the consumer was key to buyer uptake in China.

to-business customers and consumers, using recipes and promoted tastings.

"Educating the consumer is key to buyer uptake," O'Connell said.

During Covid-19, the focus for Alliance/Grand-Farm activities had been on retail which "gives the volume and traction" but the co-operative is not forgetting foodservice, he explained.

Retail sales have been going well for Alliance since the launch, two years ago, of its new retail range of venison products into selected supermarkets and Grand Farm's own stores. This is helping to enhance the brand image and promote brand awareness.



**EXPANDING:** Venison belly cubes is one of the products launched last year in China in the Alliance and Grand Farm's New Zealand venison ranges.

The roll-out was supported with funds from the Passion2Profit innovation programme, which helped with a professional chef for in-store venison cooking demonstrations during the retail launch, free gifts with purchases and attendance at food shows, along with digital media activity.

Consumer interaction increased, identifying potential customers and showing them how to

use venison. "This brings venison products closer to daily life, cultivating a long-term and stable consumer base," O'Connell said.

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## "China's a very complex market and we need to reshape the way we think about the entire value chain and work closely with our partners."

Terry O'Connell

However, now restaurants have re-opened, and contacts are being re-established, the retail/foodservice balance is being restored. Alliance's importer in Shanghai is now directing premium cuts into the foodservice trade. The company also had a stand at the SIAL international food exhibition in Shanghai in mid-May where Grand Farm's venison cubes were nominated for the 2023 SIAL Innovation award.

China "and wider Asia" are important not only to Alliance, but also the whole venison sector to achieve a good balance of markets, O'Connell said. They add the third leg to the venison marketing stool to "give us the best opportunity to inject some much-needed value into the venison category."

Venison marketing companies are aiming for one third to Europe, one third to China and others and one third to North America.

"We've got the foundation here. Now we've just got to make sure that we work it correctly to get the best value out of it," says O'Connell.

## Steady recovery

Duncan NZ's marketing manager Chris Duncan said the US foodservice market was "on a steady road to recovery".

Covid-19 had prompted the company's diversification into retail,

but foodservice clients were still a major focus. He said that US consumers and Duncan NZ clients were still “wary” due to geopolitical concerns and inflationary pressures, but spending was trending upwards.

“We’re seeing more spending in the foodservice market...and we’re seeing this reflected in the demand at importer level for higher value products.”

That was good news but more innovation and promotion work was needed across the supply chain to “keep putting money on the schedule”. It wasn’t a straightforward exercise due to the shortage of labour and rising costs. This was driving the demand for convenience style products such as pre-portioned cuts for both retail and foodservice clients. Duncan NZ had done a lot of product development in this area but getting the products into market had been hampered by Covid-19 lockdowns.

“We couldn’t do (in-market) promotions which are so important and on top of that many restaurants were running very simplified menus. They weren’t that receptive to new ideas and alternative products. It was difficult to get things over the line.”

But there were positive signs of improvement such as the return of inbound US clients for the first time since 2020.

“We hosted them earlier this year taking them to talk to farmers and through the processing plant so they could see first-hand the skill and care we put into our system. The value that these (visits) have in generating demand can’t be understated.”



**CONVENIENCE:** Chris Duncan said labour shortages and rising costs across the supply chain was driving demand for convenience-type products.



**HUNTING HIPSTERS:** High disposable income wannabe - hunters are in the sights of First Light.

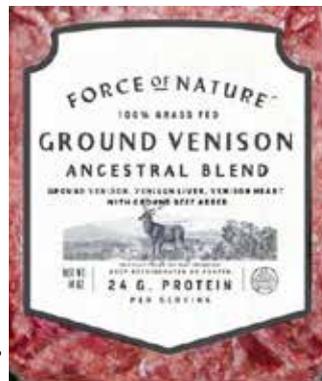
First Light’s general manager venison Matt Gibson told conference delegates that “hunting hipsters” were the target for the company’s current promotion campaign in the US. They were the high disposable income, urban cowboy/ hunting fraternity who liked the idea of stalking prey but in reality, were highly unlikely to ever kill a stag. They had a preference for shopping at specialty retail stores or online which had prompted First Light to add eight

New Zealand elk products to their e-commerce site.

Also, a new premium venison petfood range had been released, adding a significant premium to bones and offal. The value-adding approach has been applied to other co-products with two new micronutrient capsules due for release.

Elk is commonly recognised by US hunters and has potential for higher returns to New Zealand farmers as the category grows, Mountain River marketing director John Sadler said.

Mountain River was supplying regenerative specialist, Force of Nature, New Zealand elk. A new addition was ‘Ancestral Blend’ a venison/beef ground mince brick, along with a ‘Big Game Box’ of a variety of grass-fed New Zealand venison cuts.



**GRASS FED GOODNESS:** Force of Nature’s ‘Ancestral Blend’ includes ground New Zealand venison, heart, liver and beef.

The five venison companies were US-bound soon after conference to a venison stand at the massive National Restaurant Association trade show in Chicago. The companies were hopeful that a joint application for promotional support from MPI’s Sustainable Food & Fibres fund would be successful, allowing further investment to grow venison sales through USA supermarkets. ■

## Venison finding its place in China

In the year-ending December 2022, New Zealand export statistics record more than 2000 tonnes of venison was exported to China, up from zero in 2007.

In 2008, the NZ-China Free Trade Agreement was signed, clarifying rules around export registration, and venison marketing companies have been developing trade relationships with key customers ever since.

DINZ market development manager Rhys Griffiths also points to the now-concluded Passion2Profit Primary Growth Partnership. That gave a significant boost to efforts to develop the market for New Zealand venison, through funding a significant amount of chef trials and consumer insight research and support for venison companies’ launch of new retail and foodservice venison products in the market (see Deer Industry News April-June 2022).

“Our venison companies have built the trade relationships and undertaken new product development and market research to develop specific market niches,” he explains.

The new distribution channels are diverse, with growing retail presence, as well as venison going into manufacturing items and the restaurant and catering business.

Watch this space this year for more progress.

# Health food sector “extremely exciting” for New Zealand velvet

By Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

**WORK IS ALREADY** underway by DINZ and the velvet marketing companies on the health food opportunities in China and is “challenging the norm” of velvet presentation in the market, DINZ market development manager Rhys Griffiths’ presentation showed.

After arriving in the market for a recent two-week visit, Griffiths went straight from the plane to a workshop, aiming to show Chinese chefs how to work with fresh New Zealand velvet.

A Chinese chef had put together a range of dishes for the workshop, organised for DINZ by the Tribal Brand Asia agency. The menu, sampled by around 20 supermarket buyers and chefs, included a velvet pate, a velvet soup – declared “absolutely delicious” by Griffiths – mushrooms with a velvet sauce, velvet cakes and a velvet sorbet.



**SWEET AS:** Velvet cakes ready for guests to try.

**“We’re following the same pathway as Korea, moving from traditional medicine to healthy foods,” he explained.**

Rhys Griffiths, DINZ market development manager

It was a way of “challenging the norm that’s out there,” Griffiths said. “The chef was really awesome at explaining velvet’s properties.”

Chinese health food companies are also being targeted. Griffiths and China Deer Velvet Coalition (CDVC) representative Felix Shen met with representatives from health and food company Infitus – which owns the Lee Kum Kee and other retail brands, along with a chain of cafes. They are “really keen on looking at New Zealand velvet as one of their ingredients,” Griffiths said.

While New Zealand velvet marketing in China will “look a bit different” to what has been done in Korea, the Korean experience will be relevant for the market.



**TEMPTING:** Potential Chinese buyers were enticed by the range of menu possibilities for fresh New Zealand velvet.



**SUPPORTIVE:** CDVC’s Felix Shen outside the Infitus headquarters.

“We’re following the same pathway as Korea, moving from traditional medicine to healthy foods,” he explained.

Alpine Deer and the China Deer Velvet Coalition (CDVC) comprising Provelco, CK and PGG Wrightson, are among the companies “leading the charge” into the market, where consumer demand has been strong for velvet’s anti-fatigue and other wellness properties.

This was why the focus on health food companies and work being led by DINZ on New Zealand provenance is particularly important.

“Because it establishes us as a provenance brand, will lift value, and connects the New Zealand story to Chinese consumers too, Griffiths said.

Already launched in Korea, the newly trademarked Nature’s Superpower Supplement, will be localised for the Chinese market and be available for all of the deer industry to use in their promotional work. ■

## Q & A

By Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

**CONFERENCE DELEGATES PUSHED** for more detail on prices following the DINZ and marketer presentations.

One farmer asked for more information about prices in particular markets. That was difficult to answer and depended on the product blend in each particular market, Alliance Group’s Terry O’Connell said, but all were focused on maximising value and achieving good margins.



**QUESTION TIME:** Board members (left to right) board observer Hamish Glendinning, Tony Cochrane, Kris Orange, Nigel Jones, Jacqueline Rowarth and Gerard Hickey tune in to questions from the floor.

**What are DINZ and the meat companies doing to get a more financially stable result?**

That was the question from South Canterbury farmer David Morgan who congratulated Mandy Bell on her courageous

presentation but reiterated that farmers were frustrated about the lack of certainty on the venison price. DINZ board member Kris Orange suggested that more in-line breeder-finisher arrangements could be part of the answer. He had been part of an arrangement and believed they should be used more because they would give price certainty. Another board member, First Light's Gerard Hickey said the diversification away from European food service to retail would give more price stability. NZDFA Taihape-Ruapehu branch member Andrew Peters said the volatility in prices was a turn-off to bankers and young people entering the industry. Board observer Hamish Glendinning, a former bank manager, said more community engagement with bank managers was needed. However, he said that 'debt funding' was not the only way to entice young people to the industry and that cadetship-type schemes supported by farmers could be an option.

### How will the deer industry be able to fulfil future venison demand given the shrinking herd?

That was a critical question with no easy answer, board member and Alliance Group's Nigel Jones said, and would require a whole of industry approach and focus. The ultimate goal was to maximise value along the supply chain to inspire confidence and the rebuilding of hind numbers.

### Why the catch cry for 'more, heavier and earlier' when farmers were not paid accordingly for animals over 85kgCW?

NZDFA Waipa branch member Leith Chick said the reduction in deer numbers was one issue but so too was wastage. Gerard Hickey said historically the emphasis was on early heavier weight animals for the September-October European market. However, that was changing with market diversification edging venison exports to a reasonably even three-way Europe, North America, and China split.

"Things will change dramatically, bear with us."

### How are marketers proving to overseas markets the green credentials of NZ farmed venison?

It was a big question, First Light's Matt Gibson said, and his experience from the US market was that consumers were more concerned over 'grass-fed' rather than GHG emissions. ■

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## Support our rural leaders, Adams says

By Ali Spencer, *Deer Industry News* writer

Farmers need to be clear about what are they are looking for from our rural leaders and it is important that they "have their leaders' backs," deer industry conference-goers heard from Mark Adams, the chair of the South Canterbury Rural Support

Trust and deer industry conference guest speaker. "Something significant happened," during the recent Beef + Lamb NZ (B+LNZ) elections, which saw the B+LNZ chair Andrew Morrison unseated by Southland beef and sheep farmer Geoffrey Young, he thought.

New Zealand's primary sector is being watched as a leader by its peers around the world, he said. "There's a responsibility that comes with that."

B+LNZ's Environmental Reference Group (ERG), which he chaired for four years, had had access to all the latest climate change and environmental information and thinking "straight out of the oven," he explained.

Coming up with alternative ways to price on farm emissions "to try and bring some equity to the table", however, threw up problems. Amongst them was complexity and "consistency across the country" and across sectors.

Farmers initially challenged B+LNZ, DINZ and the other primary sector groups to "be courageous, to face trouble and lean into the hard conversations." They did this working together to strengthen the sector's voice, over the two years leading up to the production of the primary sector's submission to government.

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### "Not being agreed with is not the same as not being listened to."

Mark Adams

He Waka Eke Noa (HWEN) was always going to be "simplistic and blunt," and the vehicle was set up to operate "under [tight] timeframes that were unrealistic," he said. But, if the leaders had elected not to come up with a system, "we would have been chucked into the Emissions Trading Scheme," he reminded the audience.

"If you're in leadership, you've got to deal with what's in front of you."

Fundamentally, he believes, "we were set up by a government that had a punitive mindset." Having a majority Labour government made it even more difficult, but "I don't believe National are providing alternative solutions either," as the country has "signed up for some serious obligations."

Rather than take their objections up with government, however, some farmers decided to hold their leadership to account "and especially the leadership that dared to pick up the poisoned chalice."



ADAMS: "If you're in leadership, you have to deal with what's in front of you."

At that point, the pastoral conversation started fracturing. A group of sheep and beef farmers broke away and formed a new group last September called “Waka Adrift.” He acknowledged the group’s feeling that “it was all going too fast,” but doesn’t believe it can simply be stopped now.

“We have to engage,” and keep talking to come to agreement. Each sector needs to “advocate at multiple levels all the time, making our message heard.”

While leaders should be challenged, those challengers should have “new thinking, ideas and innovation,” he argued. Ginger groups have an important role to play, but when they start prescribing “without all of the information, that’s a whole different thing,” he said.

“Not being agreed with is not the same as not being listened to.”

While it is being worked through, our leadership needed to be supported to make progress, he said.

## Deer voice is getting heard

Finding a way through the HWEN noise has been difficult for the deer sector, but Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) and the New Zealand Deer Farmers Association (NZDFA) have been working together to get the deer message through.

The NZDFA executive committee had been part of the group “Option One Transformed”, to give another deer industry voice in the whole sector conversation, deer farmer and NZDFA executive member Karen Middelberg explained, in the ensuing question and answer session.

She felt the group had “actually done a lot of good” in the conversations around the impact of greenhouse gas pricing on the extensive farming sector. She believes when leadership “is not representing you well,” it should be challenged.

“Initially, we set about offering some practical solutions to what we saw was an unfair tilting towards the intensive part of the sector,” she said. Working with DINZ to provide farm profitability modelling they showed the impact on the deer industry.



**GETTING HEARD:** Karen Middelberg was part of Option One Transformed, which she felt had “actually done a lot of good” in getting the deer sector’s message through.

The deer sector had access at the highest level to decision makers through DINZ chair Mandy Bell being one of the members of the Food & Fibre Leaders Forum (FFLF). In the conference Q&A session, Bell acknowledged the work done by DINZ chief executive Innes Moffat, the ERG, Middelberg and others through the HWEN process. While DINZ voiced the deer industry’s concerns loudly through the HWEN working groups, the decisions were made at the FFLG level.

“We managed to create some awareness of the inequity for the extensive sector and moved the goalposts in its favour. We moved aside when it started to become political and was renamed “Waka Adrift.”

In that forum: “As a smaller industry, we have a significant voice in the group of 11 partners – all of whom respect each other and are listening every which way.” As part of the forum, the deer industry has regular “direct conversations with ministers and the Prime Minister,” Bell said.

HWEN seems to have all happened so fast, but speaking later Bell commented communicating changes, “usually for the better” which happen as a result of collaborative discussions, is a major challenge for all leaders. “These are not easily relayed to all farmers in the tight time frame sometimes required when things are moving at pace.”

Leaders need to get better at having the “deeper conversations with farmers when things are moving at pace,” she acknowledged, “but sometimes that’s not possible.” Echoing Adam’s comments, she felt farmers need to support leaders, “who have significant knowledge and many conversations with HWEN partners and government.

“The best outcomes come from the sweet spot of conversations.”

Through the forum, the deer industry, B+LNZ and the HWEN partnership provided modelling that – alongside MPI models – showed the impact on extensive operations was “very real,” she said. This has been fed into recommendations to Cabinet for an agricultural emissions pricing scheme.

“Globally, we are facing climate change and seeing real impacts here in New Zealand,” Bell says.

“We need collaborative leadership and partnerships to support our industries to play our part in decreasing emissions. It is not easy for primary sector leaders, with our sectors having different drivers and farm systems. There will need to be compromise.”

Key for the deer sector will be “ensuring there is viability for our businesses and a just transition to lower emissions systems,” Bell reiterates.

Deer farmers will need to read the signals, be proactive and know their GHG emission number, she says.

“Many already have carbon plans and there will be opportunities for revenue and market advantage as programmes are developed.” ■



**VERY REAL:** Mandy Bell said modelling by DINZ, and B+LNZ, alongside MPI’s, showed the “impact on extensive operations was very real.”

## Where HWEN is at

Last December, the HWEN partnership noted the government's agricultural emissions pricing report was "moving in the right direction," but there was still a lot of work to do on the detail.

At the time, the group welcomed the Government's willingness to engage with them to work through the concerns about the Government's pricing proposal. The partners noted the Government's commitment to designing a system that is practical to implement and "with a view to maintaining a viable and productive agriculture sector" and will look for this to be carried through into legislation and implementation.

Key for the deer sector is seeking viability for its businesses and, with a pricing introduction, a just transition as mitigations are developed.

Cabinet was expected to make a decision on the new system in mid-March, but this has been delayed. While there has been a lot going on behind the scenes since, time is ticking. With the forthcoming election on 14 October, at the time of writing it is now looking increasingly unlikely that any new emissions pricing system will be up and running in time for the primary sector to be able to comply with the legislation's 1 October 2025 start date.

Here's what the parties' policies were looking like, at the time of writing, around agricultural greenhouse gas emissions.

- The **Labour Party's** priority is tackling climate change. It has reiterated its intention to continue working with farmers on "our world-first partnership to reduce primary sector climate emissions at the farm level, including improving tools for estimating and benchmarking emissions on farms, increasing farm advisory capacity and capability and providing recognition for on-farm mitigation," according to its website. Under its majority control, government has boosted funding for agricultural climate change research programmes and invested in innovative low carbon technology.
- The **National Party** is committed to reaching Net Zero by 2050 but in early June publicly withdrew its support for the government's agricultural emissions plans, because it says government is no longer working in partnership with the

sector. A new 'Reducing Agricultural Emissions' policy was released on 12 June that will "give farmers the tools they need to reduce emissions, including recognising on-farm sequestration, measuring farm level emissions by 2025 and update biotechnology rules." According to that, National plans to keep agriculture out of the ETS but to implement "a fair and sustainable pricing system for on-farm agricultural emissions", with an independent board to establish pricing, by 2030 at the latest.

- The **Green Party** led the development of the all-of-government plan to cut climate pollution, which will be critical in meeting New Zealand's international climate obligations. It will "support the agricultural sector through a just transition to reduce its emissions, minimise harmful inputs and practices, regenerate rural land and water and build resilience," according to its website. Co-leader James Shaw has made no secret of the fact he does not like the proposed farm level emissions pricing scheme but recognises buy-in from the sector is important and has been working with HWEN members on its development.
- The **Act Party** "wants to see the rural sector given the respect it deserves," and a more cooperative approach between government and the rural sector. Among its policies are: the repeal of the Zero Carbon Act and the introduction of a "no-nonsense climate change plan which ties our carbon price to the prices paid by our top five trading partners"; to "recognise that methane from livestock, as a short-lived gas, has a very different effect on global temperatures"; and to "push government to provide leadership on more accurate measurement and management frameworks for methane emissions."
- The **Opportunities Party (TOP)** wants to "empower farmers to be bio-diversity champions through a national system rewarding landowners who regenerate marginal landscapes for biodiversity, carbon sequestration and other environmental gains." It is looking to create a natural capital economy by "incentivising farmers to change their land use practices where it makes most sense to them" including data-mapping, analysis, land-guardian training and support and biodiversity credits. It's looking for an ETS "with teeth".

## Arise Sir Ian

By Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

"THE FOOTSTEPS WE lay down in our past create the paving stones where we stand today," was a proverb and opening comment from Sir Ian Taylor.

"It's a Māori world view and the most important thing about it is that those footsteps are always in front of you," he said

That footstep analogy was relevant in the development of the deer industry, given the likes of visionary pioneers such as Tim Wallis.

"Your footsteps and other people's footsteps taken make it a lot easier going into the future."

He gave the example of a prediction by an eminent scientist in 1879 that everyone acquainted with the electric lightbulb would recognise it as a conspicuous failure. It wasn't, and, what in hindsight had been a simple first step of new technology had jumpstarted new businesses around the world.

He overviewed the many past footsteps and humorous stories in evolving Animation Research



**OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS:** Sir Ian Taylor said seizing opportunity and worrying about the detail on how to deliver later had been key to the success of ARL.

Limited (ARL), one of Australasia's leading computer graphics production houses, turning digital data into pictures. One of the first laid was a news piece that Sir Ian, a former television presenter, fronted back in the late-1980s about the entertainment possibilities using computer technology. The story sparked his imagination leading to the establishment of ARL in 1990. Over the ensuing decades the business fast established an international profile for its expertise in graphics for many sporting codes including yachting, Formula One racing, cricket, basketball, and golf.

Although they were in the high tech game, number 8 wire thinking was crucial to ARL's success. An example was the development of cricket ball tracking technology which started at the business's Dunedin offices on a mocked up miniature cricket ground cobbled together with a \$2.50 sheet of wood, rubbish bins, Jaffas, gaffer tape and a light stand.

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**"Number 8 wire was never about a piece of wire. It was always about what innovative farmers at the bottom of the world were doing with wire and other people. That's what makes us different."**

Sir Ian Taylor

Sir Ian said ARL's mission statement, 'Bugger the boxing and pour the concrete anyway', coined by the receptionist as part of a tongue-in-cheek inhouse competition, perfectly epitomised their approach to business.

"You just kind of do it....and it's what's brought me to be standing here in front of you today."

One of the best and worst years was 2020. ARL had recently signed up the America's Cup worldwide, international golf tournaments and were in early discussions with Major League baseball until Covid-19 struck. The ARL team were forced out of the office to work from home but before they went, Sir Ian said to look at Covid-19 as an opportunity rather than a challenge. What transpired was the seven week development of remotely produced and delivered reality graphics for the American PGA Tour. It was an idea and technology that had come about because of Covid-19.

ARL's growth had happened despite the absence of any business plan, which probably wouldn't sit well in a levy funded organisation such as DINZ. However, he had a number of messages applicable to any businesses or organisation such as believing in and supporting your team; seizing the opportunity and worrying about the detail later; and remembering that people, plants, and animals are all connected.

'Humans are totally dependent on the natural world...we are damaging the world so profoundly that many of the systems we rely on are on the verge of breakdown, we can fix it with science backed with facts, and respect.' ■

## Winners are gridders

By Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

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**"There is no such thing as a completed plan when it comes to these awards as we work with an ever-changing environment,"**

Grant Charteris

The diversity of systems and geographical spread of entrants made the judging process difficult for the Environmental Awards panel of MPI project lead South, Janet Gregory; DINZ producer manager Lindsay Fung; DINZ environmental stewardship manager Sara Elmes; and 2021 Premier Elworthy Award winner Grant Charteris.

The size, production systems, ownership structure, topography and environmental challenges varied on the entrant farms, but common to all was extreme passion and pride in what they were doing, Charteris said in the Awards brochure.

### Premier Award: The Elworthy Environmental Award

Ministry for Primary Industries  
Manatū Ahu Matua



 **Deer Industry**  
New Zealand



"They had a strong environmental focus which molded seamlessly with their production results and animal health and welfare."

The X factor of the 2022 premier prize Elworthy Award winners, Richard and Sarah Burdon, was the excellent integration of a complex camping ground; sheep, beef and deer farm; and trophy hunting business.

The award recognizes 'total commitment to farming sustainably with a strong customer focus' which the Burdons' achieved with distinction as well as integration of the three businesses.

The large areas of retired and regenerated native vegetation which protected streams and enhanced biodiversity impressed Janet Gregory. She also made mention of the Burdon's nil-wastage policy in the trophy hunting business with surplus venison

donated to community groups.

Richard and Sarah, third generation farmers took over the management of Glen Dene in 2001. The 6000 ha ranges from undulating terraces to very steep hill country and is situated between Lake Hawea and Lake Wanaka. Its setting on a popular tourist route has created the opportunity for agritourism, the downside being constant public scrutiny.

The Burdons also won the First Light Award recognising total commitment to farming sustainably with a strong customer focus.



Entering the awards was a significant milestone, Richard Burdon says, and the experience was a great opportunity to reflect on Glen Dene's sustainability, conservation and regenerative tourism achievements and aspirations.

*A field day at Glen Dene overlooking the farming operation will be scheduled for later in the year.*

## NZ Landcare Trust Award

For excellence in sustainable deer farming through actions on the ground



South Canterbury farmers Lyal Cullen and Marion Neill's practical and effective environmental mitigations impressed the judges.



They have implemented a number of management measures on their 240 ha Totara Valley rolling hill predominantly deer farm including the use of rocks to fill in wallow sites, wide buffer and sediment barrier fencing, various native and exotic trees and shelterbelt plantings according to location and situation.

The couple's management of critical source areas was a stand out for Janet Gregory.

"Their attention to these areas was phenomenal in the ways they had used different mitigations according to the situation."

Lyal Cullen says entering the awards was a positive experience and it was good to get a mix of practical advice and new ideas from the judging team.

He was particularly pleased with the ongoing results from water quality testing which vindicated the management and various mitigations trialed and introduced over several years.

## Duncan New Zealand Ltd Award

For vision and innovation whilst mastering a demanding environment



Scott Hassall impressed the judges with his cut and carry of kale to maximise feed utilisation and minimise paddock damage from stock. The 940 ha North Canterbury flat to steepish dryland farm running sheep, deer and cattle farm is certainly challenging. It's in the firing line of the hot, dry northwesterly wind and is only ever "about 10 days away from a drought," Hassall says.



He's particularly proud of his kale innovation which came about through a feed shortage during an autumn drought two years ago.

"It's what enabled me to feed all the stock through the drought. It was so bad we had grass staggers in the ewes but that stopped with the feeding of the kale. I was lucky I had a loader wagon to make the cut and carry possible."

The environmental award judging process was a positive experience.

"One of the reasons I did it is that I wanted information from the experts. I know we're doing some good stuff and it was good to get their positive feedback."

## NZDFA Next Generation Award

For outstanding performance across environmental, financial, and social aspects of the business



Mike Humphrey's commitment to education, and the community made him the perfect recipient of this award.



He is a regular host of Massey University students, rural professionals and vets on his 250 ha flat to steep hill farm running 1800 deer.

The judges noted the farming challenges of the summer-dry and winter-wet heavy clay country. Humphrey says his overall farming approach is to “read the weather and make sure deer are in the right place.” He has established 45 ha of forestry, shelterbelts and riparian plantings and fenced off three kilometers of waterways. He said the plantings were aesthetically pleasing but had been “a bit of a headache” when it came to planning fencing around possible flooding and erosion.

“It’s been a learning exercise.”

## Gallagher Technology and Innovation Award

For excellent utilisation of farming technologies to improve farm productivity and manage resources



The sound stock management of multiple stock classes in a small mob system caught the attention of the award judges.



“They were well fed, well socialized and relaxed,” Janet Gregory says.

The healthy deer were a credit to owner Simone Hoskin of Five Hawks Farm, Manawatu.

Hoskins' farm, alongside a main road and bounded by 17 neighbours, was in the public eye but her efficient feed management kept both her deer and onlookers happy.

## The Streamlands Export Ltd Award

For leading, environmentally sustainable velvet farming



The deer shed set-up was a stand-out feature at Ross and Monique Moore’s Waikato deer farm. This along with several outside-the-box management actions earned them the Streamlands Export Ltd Award. Although only a 42 ha (effective) farm it was big on native and novel tree plantings, sediment traps and an excellent shed facility.



Ross Moore had applied his tool maker and engineering talents in upgrading the deer shed, previously developed from a woolshed, in the lead up to the new regulated control scheme for velvet in 2017. The deer flow exceptionally well through the all-steel framed and 2.4 metre high walled area. But the showpiece is the fully concealed and bird-proof crush room. Moore, also a Provelco velvet buyer was adamant that this area had to be free from contamination and it was Monique, who has a food safety background, that came up with the wrap around food grade plastic idea.

She was the mastermind behind the native tree planting spending time to research what species were best suited to the location. The couple along with sons Angus and Oscar have planted 5000 natives on six hectare, saving \$100,000 in contract planting costs.

Getting information together in the lead up to the judging had been stressful but ultimately rewarding, Moore says.

“It made me realize what we have achieved.” ■

## Grassroots good guy

By Lynda Gray, *Deer Industry News* editor

The 2023 Matuschka Award winner Robbie Bruce has for a long time been the “life blood” of the NZDFA Taihape-Ruapehu branch. Nominators were quick to sing the praises of the unsung contributor over 30 years to branch and other deer-related activities in the region.

Bruce had fulfilled treasurer and secretary roles – sometimes concurrently – for the branch and helped out at countless events and field days. He became computer literate before many of his deer farming counterparts and these specialist skills were put to good use in branch financial administration and newsletter production.

He was often seen “towing a large trailer freezer all over the country” to local, regional and national velvet competitions.

Bruce was the driving force behind the establishment of Ruapehu Deer Marketing to operate the branch’s velvet pools and weaner fairs. Under his watchful eye, the branch had “accrued a substantial bank account.”

These many contributions happened alongside the running of the family deer stud at Mataroa. The “very productive” deer unit is today focused on velvet production. ■



# Proof Is Truth: Melior tops AgResearch across-breed liveweight gain trial.

The growth performance of MG198/18 (Chardonnay) progeny in the recent AgResearch across-herd breeding connectedness (ABC) trial is more science-backed evidence of Melior's successful genetics programme.

Elite sire Chardonnay's progeny dominated growthbased performance results specifically:

- Heaviest red mid-October weight for both sexes, a 10.9 kg advantage over the next red sire
- Heaviest male mid-October weight for both red and wapiti
- Second highest sexual dimorphism indicating breeding efficiency - fast growing stag progeny from smaller hinds who eat less.

Tom Macfarlane and the Melior Deer team are fierce advocates of DeerSelect's estimated breed values, supplying the data every year to clients so they can make accurate and informed purchasing decisions.

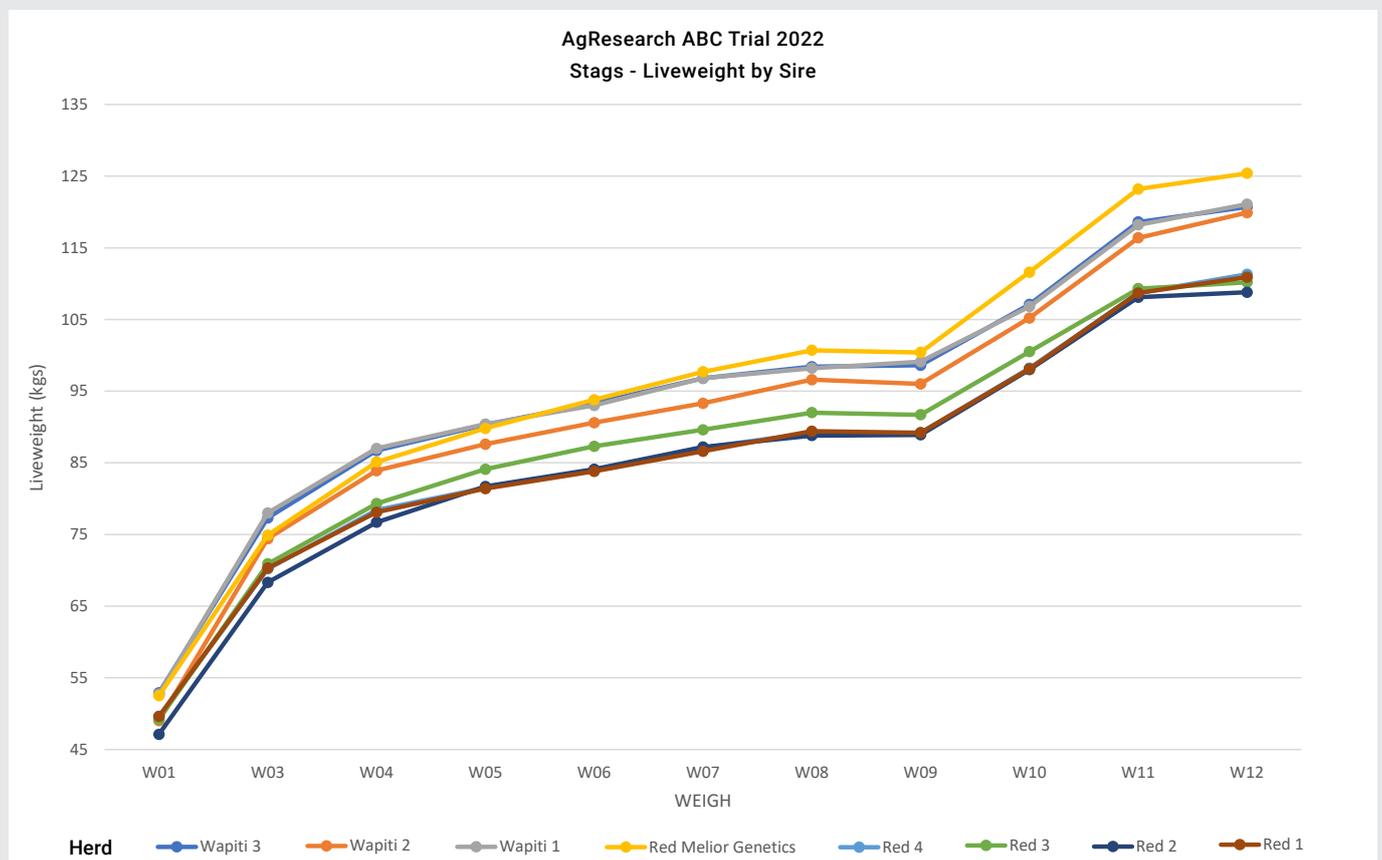
The across-herd breeding connectedness results further validate the feed efficiency and production benefits achievable with Melior.

Melior 7th In-Calf Hinds Sales Tues 4th July 1pm (Viewing and BBQ from 12). 480 Gudex Road, RD17, Fairlie. Tom MacFarlane 027 600 8555 / Murray Coutts 027 403 9377

*Advertorial supplied.*



Elite sire Chardonnay is named after Melior geneticist Jake Chardon.





NZDFA Executive Committee: Chair Justin Stevens, Jamie Ward, Mark McCoard, Karen Middelberg

# NZDFA AGM

By Ali Spencer *Deer Industry News* writer

## Challenging season “ended on a positive note”

**BUSINESS RAN THROUGH** smoothly at the New Zealand Deer Farmers Association (NZDFA)’s 48th Annual General Meeting held at the Hotel Ashburton, Canterbury, on Wednesday 10 May 2023. This included a moment of silence in memory of four members who had passed away during the year: Philip Irwin (Hawke’s Bay); Avis Foote (Marlborough); Hans Klisser and Barry Bishop (both South Canterbury North Otago).

Chair Justin Stevens’ report highlighted progress made during the year by the Association.

Stevens noted the contribution of former DINZ producer manager Tony Pearse, along with the conclusion of the Passion 2 Profit programme, which “ended on a positive note”, he said. Information gathered during the P2P programme is now available for all deer farmers on the Deer Hub on the DINZ website. By focusing on venison production as well as quality, the Stevens had increased their per head return, he said. He encouraged deer farmers to take a look at the website ([deernz.org/deer-hub](http://deernz.org/deer-hub)) to see what can be achieved in their own operations.

The season had been challenging and Stevens was disappointed to see this impacted further by rising farm input costs, which had lifted 15 percent from the previous season.

The NZDFA Executive and DINZ producer manager Lindsay Fung had worked on submissions for He Waka Eke Noa and the National Animal Welfare Advisory Council, “with a little over two weeks between when both submissions had to be in.”

The New Year had brought a new deer industry strategy, “with farmers being able to have their input on the direction we will all take for the next five years,” he said.

Farmers are all producing some of the best products for the New Zealand deer industry’s consumers, “so it is up to us to see that this happens every time,” he said.

Seconding Stevens’ report, John Somerville of the NZDFA’s Southland branch thanked the NZDFA executive for “the hard work and time they’ve put in our behalf over the last year.”

Describing the NZDFA as a “crucial conduit between DINZ and farmers”, he said it was essential it is supported by members and DINZ to fulfil “the huge range of tasks” it is now involved in.

“As we have seen recently, industries that don’t understand and directly represent the members’ needs, especially in these turbulent times, suffer consequences or loss of support and confidence.”

He was “proud to be part of this organisation” that had been “visibly proactive to make things happen” in the aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle. “In this uncertain world of government policy, market disruptions and climate extremes, which test us all, it was great to see that the DFA is in great hands, and they’ve been working very hard.”

## Finance highlights

Karen Middelberg reported on the 2022-2023 accounts, which “looked a little different to previous years” as the income has been itemised out to the different events and a new accounting system at Beef + Lamb NZ Ltd, which manages payments, had made changes to coding, she explained. It should make the accounts more transparent.

- Operating deficit of \$1348 before tax
- Paid membership declined by one percent to 1097 paid subscriptions, but subscription income was up nine percent to \$108,693, because the actual subscription was increased
- Accommodation and travel costs increased to \$41,027, as lockdowns ended and also included meeting expenses. Some Zoom and in-person meetings outside Wellington are planned for 2023-2024
- Interest income went up to \$6245, as interest rates had increased
- Sundry income of \$15,819 relates to the proportion of the DINZ producer manager’s budget allocated to items such as Branch Chairs, P2P and Next Generation
- Sponsorship - \$9000 from DINZ
- General expenses of \$8987 included \$5000 for new NZDFA jackets and hats, for which some sponsorship had been obtained, along with meeting expenses

The financials were approved and seconded by John Somerville.

## DINZ Board candidates

Delegates heard from four candidates standing for one producer position on the DINZ board: Paddy Boyd (deer farm manager, Haldon Station in the McKenzie Basin), Mike Salvesen (deer farmer, Wakare, Mid-Canterbury), Corey Busch (deer farmer, Hororata, Canterbury) and Matthew Carroll (farm consultant and operations manager for Westview Farming Partnership, Manawātū).

They were to be interviewed by the Selections and Appointments Panel (SAP) on 6 June, with an announcement expected in mid-June.

Their candidate profiles can be viewed at [deernz.org/candidate-profiles-dinz-board-2023](https://deernz.org/candidate-profiles-dinz-board-2023).

Re-elected DINZ board members were Alliance Group's Nigel Jones as the venison processors' representative and Tony Cochrane as the velvet processors' representative.

## Stop Press: DINZ board producer rep announced

Paddy Boyd is the new DINZ board producer representative. Boyd, the longtime manager of Haldon Station in the Mackenzie Basin has represented farmers in the Passion2Profit programme, on the SAP, the National Velvet Standards Body and the OSPRI Stakeholders committees. Last year, he was awarded Life Membership of the NZDFA in recognition of his contribution and knowledge. Boyd says he is looking forward to bringing another strong "farmer's voice" to the DINZ board table. He replaces Kris Orange, whose term finishes at the end of June.



## Producer appointments

Justin Stevens and Mark McCoard were re-elected unopposed to the NZDFA National Executive Committee, where they will continue to serve alongside Karen Middelberg and Jamie Ward (AgResearch), whose appointed term ends in 2024.

For the SAP, which elects the producer member to the DINZ board among other positions, Donald Whyte (South Canterbury North Otago NZDFA) was re-elected, and Andrew Peters (Taihape-Ruapehu) was elected to serve on the committee, which elects the producer member to the DINZ board among other positions. They join sitting members Graham Peck and William Oliver.

Presentations were made to NZDFA representatives who are stepping down from various industry committees: Peter Allen from the National Velvet Standards Body; Paddy Boyd stepped down from OSPRI stakeholders council; Leith Chick from the SAP.

Progress made in the Association's year to end March 2023, including the full President's Report, can be found online in the NZDFA annual report at [deernz.org/NZDFA-Annual-Report-2022-23](https://deernz.org/NZDFA-Annual-Report-2022-23). ■



## Cost creep

**THE REALITY OF** cost creep for farmers was highlighted in a brief conference presentation by NZDFA chair Justin Stevens.

He illustrated his and wife Rebecca's experience of rising costs on their Marlborough deer farm and vineyard comparing the 2002 and 2023 costs of power, diesel fertiliser and a new tractor. Using the Reserve Bank's inflation calculator the percentage increases in these essential inputs over the 21 year period were revealed. This showed a 205% price increase for power; 240% for diesel, 219% for Crop 20 fertiliser and 375% for Sulphur Super 20. These percentage increases were at least three-times the consumer price inflation rate of 63%.

### Key farm input costs

Justin & Rebecca Stevens, Marlborough, 2002 vs 2023

	2002	2023	% increase	CPI-adjusted 63% increase (2022 - 2023)
Power	8.5 c/kW	17.5 c/kW	+205	13.9 c/kW
Diesel	64 c/ltr	154 c/ltr	+240	104 c/ltr
Crop 20	\$497/ton	\$1,087/ton	+219	\$810/ton
Sulphur Super 20	\$160/ton	\$600/ton	+375	\$261/ton
New tractor	\$40,000	\$170,000	+425	\$65,200

A recent B+LNZ report confirms the disparity between on farm and general CPI inflation. On farm inflation for 2022-23 was at a 40 year high, sitting at 16.3 percent – two-and-a-half times the CPI rate of 6.7 percent. The main contributor to the increase was interest rates, which doubled from March 2022 to March 2023. Feed and grazing costs were up by about 15 percent, and fertiliser, lime and seeds 14 percent.

"Everyone along the (venison) supply chain is under price pressure and there's no easy answer on how to address it," Stevens says.

However, he questioned the apparent cost-plus mentality of retailers on product pricing.

"Ten years ago a product that wholesaled at \$10 might have sold at retail for \$20, but now the retail price for that same product is probably \$25. Is the consumer getting that much more 'added value' from that same product?"



**Justin Stevens, NZDFA Executive Chair**  
jrstevens@actrix.co.nz

# The Falconers of Clachanburn: making the best of their land and animals

By Trevor Walton Deer Industry News writer

Clachanburn Station, near Ranfurly, Central Otago, has a well-deserved reputation for the quality of its elk and cross-bred terminal sires. The success of its antler breeding programme is reflected in an array of velvet and hard antler trophies.



PICTURE PERFECT: Clachanburn, with its tor-studded tops, is beautiful country for farming deer.

**UNDER JOHN AND MARY** Falconer's watch, the station has become a significant, diversified business, with velvet, venison, weaner and sire sales, along with a significant trophy hunting operation.

It's hard to put your finger on why some farmers are so successful, but in the Falconers' case there is an obvious passion for deer, a capacity for hard work and that in-built X-factor – an instinctive feel for what's best for their land and animals. John and Mary clearly know how to manage their farm in ways that maximise production, without sacrificing long-term sustainability.

Clachanburn sits on the east face and tops of the Rough Ridge, a wide uplifted chunk of land studded with tors, on the west flank of the Upper Taieri Plain. Further west lie the Manorburn and Poolburn dams.

It's spectacular country, with big skies. Dry and hot in summer; cold in the winter, with snow lying on the tops for weeks at a time. It's great country for farming deer.

Of the station's 2400 hectares, 2000 are hill country. Of the balance, 270 hectares are k-line and set-grid irrigated. Making

those 270 hectares as productive as possible is key to the farm's overall productivity and sustainability. Here is grown the fodder beet that is chipped and fed with lucerne hay to the herd during winter, as well as highly productive pastures for growing young stock up to target weights in late summer and autumn.

Apart from 150 Arapawa Island sheep and 150 Highland cattle, Clachanburn is all-deer. It has 700 fully recorded elk cows on Deer Select, along with 450 stud red hinds being bred for velvet and trophy. On the commercial side, 1000 Eastern venison-type red hinds are put to terminal sires.

Until two seasons ago, the station finished all commercial progeny, but in John's words, "Something had to give." They now sell commercial weaners in March for finishing, averaging 65-70 kg liveweight depending on the season. The 1000 or so weaners that are over-wintered are all studs.

Around 600 stags are run for velvet, with about 80 9-year olds grown out each year for sale as trophies. Around 400 elk bulls are used as terminal sires and/or are destined for future sale as trophies.

“We’re breeding our red stags for both velvet and trophy. We accept that this will take longer than if we went hard-out for one trait. Our aim is to produce big, open, long heads. This gives us good clean velvet and provides the sort of trophies that our clients want to shoot.”

He says it’s easier with the elk. “In a large part they’re already where we want them to be. There’s more than enough body size for venison and we’re very happy to have 500-point and better trophies.”



**LOOKING GOOD:** The Falconers say their elk are largely where they want them to be. They have more than enough body size and they’re very happy to be producing 500-plus point trophies

John and Mary don’t exactly wear their environmental hearts on their sleeves. They’re quick to talk about their deer. Less so, about the rare native fish that live in Stony Creek, a small stream that runs through the property.

But it’s clear that these little critters – Taieri flathead galaxiids – are a source of considerable family pride. Classified as ‘nationally vulnerable’, their homes are headwater creeks surrounded by grasses and tussock that are small enough to step across.

Maximising the quality and yield of water from Stony Creek, a tributary of the Taieri River, is good for the creatures that live there, as well as for the economics of the farm.

In recent years, the Falconers have supported the work of Tiaki Maniototo. This is a project led by the Upper Taieri Catchment Group, a farmer-led group that encourages land owners to work together to improve stream water quality and flow.

In 2021, the group – working with DoC, Fish & Game, the Walking Access Commission, and the Otago Regional Council – succeeded in winning \$4.55 million in funding from the Ministry for the Environment to help achieve its objectives. Since then, the group has involved the local iwi organisation, Te Runanga o Otakou.

The Falconer’s commitment to the group has been the riparian fencing and planting of the banks of Stony Creek where it wends its way across their flats. It was work that needed to be done. As with most waterways in intensively farmed areas, the area had become a muddy deer playground.

“At \$15,000 a kilometre, it’s a big investment. Also, you need to be pretty conservative in where you place the fences – the creek needs room to move in a flood, or there will be blow-outs,” John says.

Tiaki Maniototo funded about one-third of the fencing cost. They also supplied the plants and funded most of the cost of planting.

About 4000 native plants and trees were planted, to complement existing willows, flaxes and cabbage trees, Mary says.

Tiaki Maniototo planting project manager Caitlin Daley, says frost hardy species were chosen because of the incredibly harsh climate in the Maniototo.

“They’re all species that would have grown in the area before European settlement, especially *Carex secta* and flaxes which have great water filtering and soil stabilisation traits.”

## Native plants for a severe climate

### The Clachanburn planting list

- |                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| • <i>Carex secta</i>          | • Kanuka                  |
| • <i>Carex virgata</i>        | • Manuka                  |
| • <i>Coprosma propinqua</i>   | • <i>Olearia hectorii</i> |
| • <i>Coprosma intertexta</i>  | • Swamp ribbonwood        |
| • Cottonwood                  | • Toetoe                  |
| • Flaxes (swamp and mountain) | • Ribbonwood              |
|                               | • Silver tussock          |

There are other native species that could have been planted, but supply was limited.

The hard work was done in late spring 2022 by Habitat Restorations Aotearoa, Otago-based specialists in riparian planting, weed and pest control. The Falconers have since hired the firm to maintain the young plants for them – an investment of \$2500, twice a year.

This revegetation work is visible, expensive, enjoys community support and will doubtless be effective in improving stream water quality. But it could be argued that the biggest environmental contribution made by the Falconers lies in their grazing management of their higher hill country.



**PROTECTIVE MEASURES:** Habitat Restorations Aotearoa’s Karl Bischoff places a plant protector over a toetoe, one of 4000 natives planted on the banks of the Stony Creek last November.

The judges of the 2021 Deer Industry Environmental Awards praised the Falconers for their management of stock to fit different land classes, while minimising environmental effects.

This was evident when Deer Industry News visited Clachanburn in September 2022, a feed pinch month on most South Island deer farms. The deer were settled on the hills and there was no evidence of undue tussock browsing. Tracking by deer was minimal and there was little evidence of sediment loss away from major stock crossings.

John targets higher residual pasture covers on the hills than his sheep and beef farming neighbours. He sees this as being better for deer – which prefer to graze longer swards than sheep – as well as for the health of the tussocks, which provide great shelter during fawning and contribute to soil stability.

The soils in the area are relatively high in phosphorous and low in sulphur, so he goes for the fertiliser mix with the highest commercially available sulphur level, Sulphur Super 30. Once every three years 120 kg/ha is applied, along with 3 kg of cocksfoot and clover seed.

“We try and grow as much as we can in spring and summer. We always get good growth through to the end of December, followed by a dry period in January and February which is an argument for running lower hind numbers, relative to stags,” John says.

“So far as the environment on the hills is concerned, I think it’s fine. We’re trying to enhance it, rather than fix it. Everything is there.”

Over 20 years the Falconers have invested around \$2 million in irrigation systems, drawing water from Stony Creek during periods of high water flow. That’s mainly between June and October, with some further top-ups during summer storms.

The creek has a nominal low summer flow of 5 litres/second but, in mid-summer, the gravel stretches of the streambed are dry. All the flow is under ground. Up in the tussocks, where the streambeds are solid rock, there is plenty of water for the galaxiids. The lack of downstream

water suits the small fish fine – it keeps predatory game fish out.

Nevertheless, as a condition of their water use consent, Clachanburn is required to create a physical barrier in the stream to stop brown trout from reaching the galaxiid habitat.

They’ve decided with Tiaki Maniototo to build a weir to act as a fish barrier. The weir has been on the to-do list for a couple of years but has been delayed by the need to get a renewal of their consent to draw water for irrigation and to complete repairs to one of the storage dams. Once this is done, the station will have 500,000 cubic metres of water storage.

When the weir is completed – hopefully next summer – Fish & Game will electro-fish the lake that’s been created, to remove any resident trout. John says it will also be interesting to see how many galaxiids are present. They’ll then fence and plant the whole area.

It was electro-fishing with Fish & Game four years ago that alerted the Falconers to the presence of Taieri flatheads on their farm. They’d always seen Clachanburn and its deer as special, but having a rare species thriving in their streams made it even more so.

Because the creeks and tussock country on the farm are in such good shape, there is the possibility that there are more rare native species on the station. Others have thought the same way, but the Falconers are cautious about accepting offers from agencies that would like to do a full biodiversity survey of the property.

Public knowledge of rare biodiversity can sometimes be very positive, as with the discovery of the flatheads by Fish & Game. Indirectly it has also helped bring involvement, funding and support from Tiaki Maniototo.

On the other hand, knowledge of rare species can be used by regulators to constrain the way you farm. Never mind that the biodiversity has so far survived 150 years of grazing management.

“We’re keen to do a biodiversity survey,” say the Falconers, “but we want to do it privately.” ■



**WATER PLANS:** John at the site of the proposed Stony Creek weir. It will act as a barrier to trout and other game fish that predate the rare galaxiids



**GOOD STORAGE:** John Falconer looks over Clachanburn's water storage dams. When regional council consents come through, they will have 500,000 cubic metres of storage – almost enough to keep the irrigated flats growing throughout the summer

# NZ Velvet awaits functional claim

by Richard Rennie Deer Industry News writer

**EFFORTS MADE OVER** the past six years to move deer velvet sold in Korea into the ingredients sector as a functional food component are starting to pay off for the New Zealand Deer Industry.

In 2017 a deal was signed between Yuhan Care, a subsidiary of Korea's largest pharmaceutical company Yuhan Corporation, and AgResearch as a science partner to research velvet's uses and efficacy.

As part of the agreement Yuhan committed \$1.5 million to drive the research and development and to pursue the complex process to get velvet registered as a "functional food" under Korea's food and drug regulations, and to take it to market.

Six years on, the partners are waiting for the final approval in coming months for velvet to be categorised as a functional food.

JongKyu Jang, director of brand firm Latitude is charged with promoting New Zealand velvet in Korea. He said such formal approval would significantly boost velvet's status beyond a traditional elixir, to a fully validated super-ingredient.

New Zealand suppliers were chosen as the velvet source on grounds of this country's traceability in a sector notoriously opaque at the time for exact sourcing. That transparency was on three fronts: the farming environment; animal welfare; and a traceable, hygienic supply chain.

A recent Deer Industry News visit to Korea confirmed the moves Yuhan had promised to undertake as part of the deal made in 2017. The company has created a spin off wellness firm, New Origin, and from this a chain of cafes sell menu items containing deer velvet and ginseng as ingredients.

Adjoining the café businesses is a quality retail outlet, offering the same products packaged and marketed for home use and gift giving.

A New Origin café visited was retailing a ginseng and deer velvet tonic for just over NZ\$10, with video promotion including sweeping shots of New Zealand deer farms and the Southern Alps playing in the background.

The traditional medicines sector still represents 70% of the velvet market in Korea, accounting for a significant portion of the volume trade. While value per gram may be lower, the volume helps balance the functional/medicinal sector, where quantities per

serve can be significantly lower.

Jang said any granting of a "functional food" status by Korean authorities would be noticed by Taiwanese and Chinese authorities, and quite likely to be adopted by them given Korea's velvet sector is regarded as standard setting.

DINZ has used Korea as the launch pad for its Nature's Superpower campaign, a single concept marketing message aimed at establishing New Zealand's position in the venison and velvet sector globally.

*Richard Rennie's visit to Seoul was funded by the Asia-New Zealand Foundation. ■*



**REFRESHING:** A New Origin café deer velvet and ginseng "tonic tea" retailing for about NZ\$10 a serve.



## Together we are better

Contact Ross Chambers General Manager ph: 03 348 5080 or email: [ross@provelco.co.nz](mailto:ross@provelco.co.nz)

[www.provelco.co.nz](http://www.provelco.co.nz)

# Step-by-step recovery

By Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News editor

Darryl and Lyn Butterick have dug themselves clear of the silt, shingle, twisted deer netting and battered fence posts of the 2021 Ashburton floods. It's been a step-by-step exercise in perseverance and there's still loose ends to tidy up, Darryl Butterick told the almost 80 delegates at the conference field day.

## Darryl and Lyn Butterick

Greenstreet near Ashburton, 170 ha

Cattle and lamb trading, velvet and trophy stag breeding on irrigated flats and terraces.

The deer, comprising 120 red hinds plus progeny and 250 trophy genetic stags, account for 50% of farm income.

**"IT'S BEEN A** hell of a lot of work."

He gave a warts-and-all account of the recovery following the intense and sustained three days of rain that doused mid Canterbury two years ago.



**LONG ROAD:** Darryl says it's taken almost two years to get the farming business back on track.

in water for three days (and recovered unscathed) while escaped deer, nervous and unsettled, took shelter in scrub on higher lying terraces.

"It took about four days before the water receded so all we could do was look on because there was nothing else we could do," Butterick said.

When the worst of the weather passed the devastation and damage became apparent including the 13 dairy heifers discovered in the deer shed where they had been swept by the water, trapped and drowned in a pen.

## Operation clean-up

The grim task of carting away dead stock was one of the first clean-up tasks. At the same time the round up of escaped deer started.

All the paddocks, fences and infrastructure across their 170ha beef, lamb and deer farm were affected. The worst damage was on the 45ha deer unit where raging floodwaters dumped silt and shingle smothering pasture and crop, wiping out fences, laneways and the holding pens of the deer shed. Only two deer-proof paddocks remained, everything else was gone.

As flood waters encroached, the deer escaped through broken fences. A group of 30 stags trapped between a swollen stream and river stood belly-deep

Malcolm Prouting of Mesopotamia Station, a long-time friend and helicopter pilot was on the scene in the first few days for aerial assistance, but it took a couple of attempts to track and retrieve the deer. It was a frustratingly slow job as Darryl discovered that the runaway animals very quickly return to their feral state. Pet hind Bambi proved useful, enticing back several deer, elevating her status from pain-in-the-neck to a most-valued-worker. After three weeks 30 deer were unaccounted for, some probably flood victims and others gone for good. The Buttericks' made the call to stop searching and concentrate on clean-up tasks.

Getting the deer back and contained was an interim first step, Butterick explained.

"We managed to catch them and fence them in, but the problem was we didn't have feed, so we had to get grazing elsewhere."

The Buttericks' were grateful for the help of local stock agent Murray Coutts who quickly sourced grazing throughout South Canterbury. Small mobs of stags were grazed by several farmers who took care of the velvetting before returning the animals. The hinds, grazed at Donald and Cathy Hudson's farm, were returned pre-calving.

Getting deer fences reinstated was the biggest job and made difficult by the shortage of materials and skilled labour.

"A lot of the fences were just gone...we salvaged what we could but ended up buying 500 posts."

They started with a more or less blank canvas using the few remnants of standing fences as a starting guide. The deer shed was



**FOR THE RECORD:** Sharon Peck inspects photos of the damage caused by the flood.

intact, but the outside pens weren't and once again supply and a skills shortage prolonged the rebuilding process. The project was completed in December making it possible to finally cut the overgrown velvet from the handful of stags grazing on farm.

## We're lucky to have loyal mates and businesses who chipped in and helped us in many ways, we'd have been buggered without them.

Darryl Butterick

### Recovering pasture

How to quickly establish a short-term pasture on silt and shingle smothered ground was the challenge faced by the Buttericks' and Carrfields' senior pastoral agronomist Johnny Doyle. Flood waters had dumped shingle on about one-third of the deer area, and the rest was blanketed in varying depths of low fertility silt which on testing revealed an Olsen P of 4, Potassium (2), Sulphur (1) and pH of 7.6.

Doyle, who was familiar with the Butterick's pasture and feed system and helped several farmers in the flood aftermath, said pasture renovation on deer farms was more complex than on sheep or dairy systems. Interim measures such as portable two wire fences weren't possible, and the pasture establishment had to be planned around the reinstatement of fences and laneways

Shingle was carted off the paddock areas and after levelling topped with a mix of silt and topsoil. A brassica or fodder beet crop was grown and followed on with permanent pasture.

Silt was carted away from the worst affected areas, and on the less



**BLOWOUT:** The pond in the foreground is the result of the irrigation blowout and dumped silt during the flood.



**COMPARING NOTES:** Cyclone Gabrielle-affected farmer Evan Potter appreciated the disaster recovery words of advice from Darryl.

affected silt areas topsoil was ploughed through the top layer to create a more fertile growing base. Silt and topsoil were also used to plug holes and slumps in paddocks; it was a fiddly and time-consuming job, Darry said.

What surprised Doyle was the re-emergence of grass six to eight weeks after the flood on some of the silt covered ground. On these areas a white clover, plantain and a small amount of annual clover with a modest dressing of Cropmaster 15 was broadcast or stitched in during spring.

"The idea was to get some fast growing bulk feed, with protein from the annual clover while the white clover established," Doyle said.

A wholecrop silage 'all-sorts' legume, bean and barley mix with small amounts of novel plant varieties Turbo Persian and crimson clovers, common vetch and sunflower was grown. The beans and cereals struggled in the silt, but the deep rooting vetch and sunflowers grew well. Vetch was a bulky, high quality legume for livestock that works well in silage mixes, Doyle said.

On the worst affected areas, where no grass regrew, a three year hybrid ryegrass 'flood mix' was direct-drilled. The 25kg/ha mix comprising 3 - 4kg of white clover, 2kg plantain and 19kg of hybrid ryegrass cost about \$3.50/kg thanks to donated and discounted seed from Barenbrug and Carrfields.

Cropmaster 15 and side dressings of Ammo 31 were applied to the wholecrop silage and permanent pastures. It was the cheapest way to apply nitrogen and at the same time boost sulphur levels, Doyle said.

The new growth included weeds never seen before on the farm such as willow weed, hemlock and ragwort but most were beaten back with herbicide treatment.

The first year following the flood was a shambles for the deer operation as the Buttericks' scrambled to get fencing and infrastructure back in place. Deer income was impacted before the flood with Covid-19 cancelling trophy income, and in the flood aftermath velvetting was disrupted. However, Butterick said they wanted to get repair of the deer unit right the first time, it had taken longer but it had paid off.

The farm and the deer unit are back on track, due to hard work and perseverance from the Buttericks' thanks huge support from friends and local businesses.

"We're lucky to have loyal mates and businesses who chipped in and helped us in many ways, we'd have been buggered without them."

The Ministry of Primary Industries and Ministry of Agriculture bosses all visited immediately after offering encouragement and

words of support but not a lot else. It was the local Rural Support Trust that followed through and helped them pick up the pieces.

“They got hold of the right people to help us with decision making, accessing grants and all the other stuff we needed to get going again.”

## Insuring for disaster

Butterick is adamant that the scale of flood devastation would have been minimal if the regional council ECan had heeded frequent calls to manage and control shingle build up in the lower reaches of the Ashburton River catchment.

“The capacity was there (to contain floodwaters) if the shingle had been removed. It’s something people have been warning ECan about for years....we never should never have flooded the way we did.”

An after lunch discussion at the Greenstreet Hall touched on how farmers could better advocate local councils on the management of waterways to safeguard against flooding. Catchment-wide management and solutions were needed and that was the responsibility of regional councils, not individual farmers, NZDFA executive member Jamie Ward said. Lobbying by farmer groups such as DFA branches could be part of the solution, Canterbury West Coast branch chair Lorna Humm said. NZDFA chair Justin Stevens agreed and added that regional and local councils needed to be made aware that inaction posed serious risk to both people and livestock.

The Buttericks’ were grateful for the support of their insurance broker during the claims process. There was adequate building



**OUTSTANDING:** Carrfields’ agronomist Johnny Doyle inspecting a wholecrop silage crop.

and plant insurance to cover a limited scale event such as a fire, but not flooding which caused farm-wide damage to buildings, infrastructure and fences. Butterick said his ECan levies which should have been used on flood prevention measures would have been better spent on fence insurance. ■



**COSTLY:** The replacing of deer fences was a huge expense.

## Post-flood recovery tips

- Build organic matter levels in silt damaged areas with whole crop silage, short term pastures and brassicas before establishing permanent pasture.
- Wait to see what grass does emerges from silt laden paddocks.
- Connect as soon as possible with the Rural Support Trust and similar agencies who can offer practical advice and support.

## Hectic Day

The Greenstreet area 12 kilometres west of Ashburton was particularly hard hit by the 2021 mid Canterbury floods, and the Butterick’s farm bounded by the North and South branches of the Ashburton River bore the brunt. The farm was the safety valve outlet for the heaving overflow of water and saved nearby Ashburton from more serious flooding.

ECan issued a one in ten year flood warning early on the day preceding the flood due to heavy rain in the headwaters of the Ashburton River catchment and forecast heavy rain in the lower lying catchment. The Buttericks weren’t overly concerned and took the usual measures of opening a few gates so that stock could seek higher ground if necessary. The warning was updated to a serious flood event at 10pm that evening. It was too late at that stage to take further preventative action. All the Buttericks’ could do was sit and wait.

Their land, plant, fencing, laneways were swamped and wrecked. A graphic example of the power and force of the water was the chisel plough swept about 200 metres, dumped and covered in a mountain of mud and shingle. The 2.5 tonne Cambridge roller had a similar watery ride and was discovered when flood waters receded at the bottom of a pond.

# Finger-tip tech to keep on track

By Lynda Gray, Deer Industry News editor

A 'Next Generation Deer Farmer' Facebook post asking for recommendations on digital farm recording and management software sent *Deer Industry News* in search of what's on offer.

**A QUICK GOOGLE** turned up several options and the most frequently mentioned were Cloud Farmer, Resolution, Farm IQ, My Trev, and Mobble. All appear to have similar features based around the recording, management and storage of data under the broad categories of land, people, livestock, feed and compliance. Most have the ability to customize data recording and reports according to the particular needs of farmers.

So how do you decide what's right for your particular system?

It's a horses for courses situation, BakerAg Manawatu consultant Gary Massicks says.

"Choosing what system is a bit like buying a new vehicle, you have to get it clear in your mind what exactly you want it for. There are lots of options and the more expensive usually have greater capability which is great so long as you have the confidence and skills to use them."

A number of his clients use Cloud Farmer and FarmIQ. Using the vehicle analogy he likens the former to a "single cab two-wheel drive ute" and the latter as a "4WD double cab with canopy and rack on the back". Both will more than adequately tick data recording and management tasks, but FarmIQ has a few more add on features and is possibly better suited to larger and multi-farm enterprises.

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## "Good digitally stored farm data and environmental plans score more points with bank managers."

Gary Massicks

"The 4WD option is fine, but it's a waste of money if you don't use it to its full capability."

Even people with basic smartphone skills can digitally record, Gary says. Phone photos of drench containers, animal treatments or ASD forms are all evidence and important information that can be easily uploaded and stored for other team members or auditors to access if needed.

However, he says that a good pocket knife is still a farmer's most important tool because it sharpens the pencil that records tag numbers and suchlike in the notebook when a phone isn't appropriate. But what about when the notebook goes through the wash, or is eaten by the dog (the same one that deals to the kids school homework)?

A pencil and notebook are good for back-up recording but as a mainstay it's on borrowed time and going digital makes sense for a compelling reason – interest rate savings.

"It's becoming an important factor. Good digitally stored farm data and environmental plans score more points with bank managers.

Their role has changed from 10 or 15 years ago and they're more guided in lending decisions by meeting the criteria on their computer. The computer is more likely to say, 'yes' to clean and promptly supplied data."

His final word of advice to farmers dithering on whether or not to go digital is to take the plunge.

"If you're struggling with the recording of stock numbers and recording stuff in general do it. You'll reduce risk across your farming operation and at the same time use your time more efficiently; how do you put a price on that?"

## Getting started

Most providers offer a free trial period or demo and have on-call back-up service.

## Cost

There's a range of payment options and plans on offer: flat fee, flat fee plus annual subscription; or subscription only. The subscription is usually based on stock units run and/or the number of people accessing the one account.

## Why go digital?

- Information can be captured on the spot.
- No double handling of information.
- Risk reduction through the centralization of data, making it available to all of the farming team.
- Information is easily shared with other team members.
- Data can be easily exported into other reporting formats.
- Safe storage in the cloud.

Do you have specific questions about digital farm management? Email [deerindustrynews@gmail.com](mailto:deerindustrynews@gmail.com). ■



**REAL TIME:** FarmIQ works well for staff at Rooney Farms, South Canterbury where Justin Chittock uses it for a lot of record keeping. He also likes the real time access and mapping function.



**THUMBS UP:** Resolution gets the thumbs up from Mid-Canterbury Mt Possession's Quintin Rowe where it's used for a lot of animal health and stock recording tasks.

# Taking care of parasite control

By Ginny Dodunski

**THE LONG-AWAITED** launch of Cervidae® oral drench for deer in 2021 was a milestone for deer health in New Zealand. For a long time, we had been treating deer with partially effective pour-on or injectable products or making up various ‘brews’ to try to get close to an ideal mix for a species that had differing drug requirements from sheep and cattle.

Now that we have a bespoke triple combination drench for deer, that’s worm control done and dusted, isn’t it?

Experiences in the sheep and cattle industry would suggest that this is not the case. Deer farmers would do well to learn from the problems in both these industries and act while they still have effective drench options available.

One-third of sheep farms that tested last year at Gribbles Veterinary laboratory network had *Trichostrongylus* worms resistant to triple drenches. It’s almost been possible to diagnose these worms across the fence this autumn – the black sticky scour plastered down lambs’ legs is the tip of the iceberg, but the underlying reduction in growth performance will have been happening for several seasons.

In cattle, there are at least 10 known farms with *Cooperia* that are no longer killed by triple drenches and half a dozen with the more worrying *Ostertagia* that can survive the same products.

By the time sheep and cattle farmers started using triple combination drenches on a regular basis (and most without changing much else), there were high levels of underlying resistance to the component actives in the triple, and the power of the combination to delay resistance was not what it should have been.

We know that widespread use of ‘mectin pour-ons in the deer industry has bred up gut worms that can survive this drench family. Regular use of a combination without careful management could easily result in the same outcomes as we’ve seen in sheep and cattle.

Many deer farmers are simply concerned with providing lungworm control in weaners and they perceive gut worms as far less of an issue. Lungworm has always been highly susceptible to the ‘mectin family of drenches and this has been the mainstay of control for this parasite, often as a pour-on or injection. However, there are recent reports of ‘mectin-resistant lungworm out of South America that should not be ignored.

There are two alternative ‘novel’ drenches available. In sheep

both Zolvix® and Startect® are options; with only Zolvix® being effective as a backstop for cattle. Neither of these products are effective enough to be registered for use in deer. So, it’s vital that we look after Cervidae® by using all the tools in the toolbox to reduce the impact of parasites on our deer.

These include great nutrition to grow weaners through the risk period and out the other side as fast as possible; high grazing residuals and use of ‘clean’ feed such as crops and new grass to reduce worm larval intake; using adult stock and other species to ‘vacuum’ pastures that weaners graze; alternating weaner grazing areas each year; and utilising high CARLA® sires to help build a herd that is biologically better at dealing with worm challenge.

Note that any management tactic that sees weaners grazing ‘clean’ grass

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**“It’s vital that we look after Cervidae® by using all the tools in the toolbox to reduce the impact of parasites on our deer.”**

Ginny Dodunski

areas must also be accompanied by attention to ‘refugia’ – making sure that the worms that populate those areas are not solely the offspring of worms remaining inside the weaners after regular drenching.

There is very wide variation in worm control programmes on New Zealand deer farms; from repeated monthly drenching of weaners throughout autumn and winter, to almost no drench inputs at all.

Beef + Lamb New Zealand, Massey University and AgResearch have recently completed a series of in-depth interviews with sheep and beef farmers who were identified as being low users of drench whilst still achieving good production. Keep an eye out for information from this project as it comes out over the next year. The deer industry would do well to invest in a similar piece of research to identify the practices of deer farmers who are able to farm successfully with lower drench inputs. In the end, this approach will be the surest way of protecting the performance of drench chemicals for when we do need to use them.

*Ginny Dodunski is a Manawatu vet and Wormwise programme manager. ■*

## \$500 Rebate\*

Mel and April enjoyed being with all our deer farmers at the conference last month and are keen to support more young people make deer farming their chosen career.

Remember that for a limited time we are offering a \$500 Rebate\* on fees for every staff member you enrol in training with us between 1 May 2023 to 31 July 2023.

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\*Terms and conditions apply, visit [primaryito.ac.nz/rebate-information](http://primaryito.ac.nz/rebate-information)



PrimaryITO



Te Pūkenga

# A new chapter for Downlands Deer

The purchase in June of Otago Deer Transport by Downlands Deer is an exciting development, Downlands Deer managing director Kris Orange says.

**"AMALGAMATION WITH A** like-minded business means we can grow the capacity of our specialist deer business," he says.

The Downlands fleet now comprises six trucks based out of Geraldine, three trucks out of Feilding and three in the Southland region and includes two HPV and trophy units. It's a modern line-up of trucks and trailers with purpose-built crates certified to NZQA standards. Animal welfare is at the heart of the Downlands business, Kris explains.

"We take the welfare of the animals we transport seriously and have specially outfitted crates to ensure the safe and stress-free delivery of deer. We also invest considerable time in ensuring our drivers have the skills and knowledge necessary to handle deer."

The business, established by the Orange family in 1984, has established a reputation for the safe delivery of deer and stud stock nationwide. Downlands Deer averages about two to three interisland trips a week and offers overnight purpose-built yard facilities if required. It has a strong working relationship with all the key venison processors: Duncan Venison, Mountain River,

FirstLight, Silver Fern Farms and the Alliance Group ensuring the smooth and hassle-free delivery of stock.

"We work hard at maintaining good relationships along the transportation chain and pride ourselves on a high level of customer service. It's what we know and what we do well, and we look forward to continuing this level of service into the future."

Contact Downlands Deer for the safe and reliable transportation of your deer. ■

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*Advertorial supplied.*



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# Great people and good times

Deer Industry Award 2022 winner Richard Hilson is never usually short of words, but he admits to being like a "rabbit caught in headlights" when called up on stage to accept the award. In a post-conference catch-up he shared a vet and farmer perspective of his 30-plus year involvement in the deer industry.

**THE "BEST BITS"** and highlights were the people, he said.

"Our local farmers, stud breeders and their sales events, most of the various Wellington teams and all the amazing folk we have been able to meet all over New Zealand. Deer farmers are so easy to get on with, despite their somewhat individual characters."

One of the special things, and a strength within the deer industry, was the number of husband and wife teams. That was the case on Jedburgh where he and wife Karen Middelberg worked together.

"We work and muster deer together, we make all the buying, selling and management decisions together and we keep turning up to the same deer events!"

That team approach plus a combined love of deer was unique to the sector.

"I have so many passionate deer farming mates and clients but only one or two that I would call 'passionate' about sheep. Most sheep and beef farmers in our area have to farm them, as their land cannot do much else apart from the dreaded trees. The money can waiver, year to year, but enthusiasm for sheep isn't a patch on the enthusiasm for deer."

That fervour kept many farms going in tough times. It was a currency for DINZ and needed to be nurtured, he said

Tony Pearse was someone who had nurtured Hilson's involvement in the deer industry. Pearse had supported and coerced him into regional facilitation roles for the Deer Industry Focus Farm (DIFF) and Advance Parties and co-opted his expertise for John's Management Limited.

"JML was an enjoyable 12 years, with a fresh outlook and a different crew under the leadership of Solis Norton. He became a good friend and his loss to the industry is significant."

The DIFF project in the mid-2000s was an exciting and enjoyable project.

"Our Hawke's Bay monitor farm had lots of interesting stuff going on and introduced some technology including new forages and Farmax. We had 80 to 50 at our field days, with all but one attracting 100 people."

The Hawke's Bay Advance Parties had been an outstanding success.

"I think they did pull some limelight off the NZDFA, but it has swung back and the AP programme has built on the passion for deer."

For Hilson a highlight was seeing how members, many of whom did not know each other initially, had connected and grown in confidence.

"Our AP has been an important part of most members farming lives, no more so than in a drought and during Covid lockdowns.

Did we break some Covid rules? Possibly!"

Hilson takes pride in bridging the divide between vets and farmers that happened following the heated debates preceding release of the Velvet Code of Practice in 1994. He recalls attending a Wellington meeting at DINZ and picking up on a "decidedly average" vibe. That feeling was confirmed in a lunchtime conversation with DINZ chief executive MJ Loza who told Hilson there was a prevailing anti-sentiment across the industry toward vets.

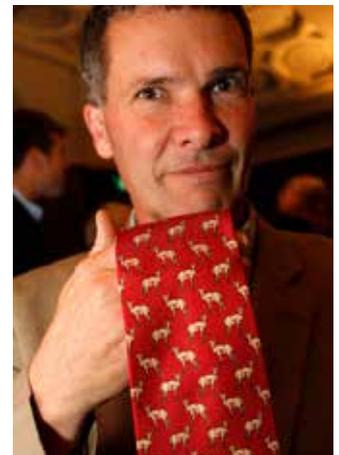
"I decided then and there that I would do my very best to improve that perception. I wanted vets to be recognised as valuable partners in the industry, and for vets to show the requisite respect for deer farmers. I hope that I made a difference."

He has enjoyed passing on both the practical and technical side of deer veterinary practice to vets at all stages of their career.

"George Williams, Laura Billings and I hosted 10 to 15 final year vet students every May for about 15 years."

A lot of deer vet work was practical and about dealing with people; it was not easy to teach but the oversight of Massey University's Professor Peter Wilson and Dr Kate Griffiths had been outstanding, he said.

Hilson was concerned about the continued shrinkage of the industry but felt that the NZDFA was doing a fantastic job of keeping things real and the re-shaped DINZ should get "runs on the board". ■



The several testimonials supporting Richard Hilson's nomination for the Deer Industry Award all mentioned his exceptional facilitation skills, and unique vet and farmer perspective which brought practical solutions.

He was an unassuming leader who ensured people felt valued and included. Also, he was a well-respected vet and, in his deer-specialist role had mentored and encouraged many veterinary students.

Hilson's experience and advice had forged the way and kept the passion for deer farming alive through the highs and lows in the Hawke's Bay community. His nomination acknowledged his passion and the years of leadership in the deer industry, veterinary health, and practical on farm excellence.

# MSD/Allflex photo competition

There were some great entries in the 2023 MSD/Allflex deer industry photo competition. Thanks again to our sponsors MSD Animal Health and Allflex. And the winners are...



1st place: Gill Maclean - Curious



People's Choice: Rowan Larcombe - Big guy rounding up his ladies



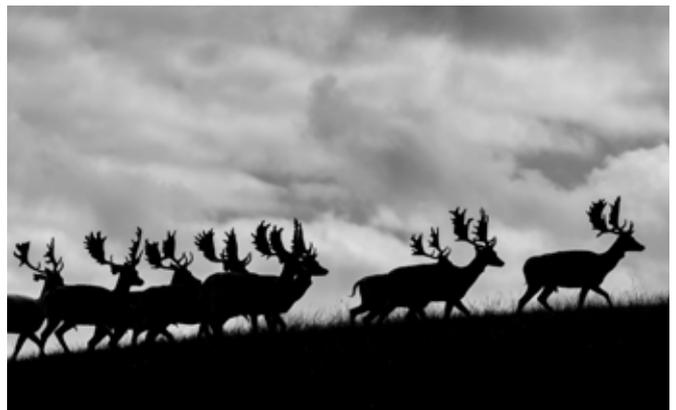
2nd place: Sophie Hansen - On a foggy Autumn Waikato morning the stags are roaring



Highly commended: Grant Charteris - Mexican standoff



3rd place: Angela McIntyre - Double take



Highly commended: Gill Maclean - On the March

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