

Executive Committee Report: Pricing for the upcoming season

The games have begun with rumours of pricing for the upcoming season no more than underhand tactics and misinformation. The NZDFA Executive has been asked by members if the prices being currently offered are reality? **We can assure you: NO!**

It is unlikely any firm pricing for the new season will be available until the later end of September, early October. The buyers currently doing the rounds indicating price are merely trying to set the scene for their own gain or that of overseas individuals who have a short-term trading mentality rather than a long-term industry view. Any decrease in prices from last season will be unacceptable, while greater transparency and an improvement in some buyer's behaviour and attitude is needed.

The other strategy employed by some buyers is to get a high-profile individual on board and look after them well. This gives credibility to their reputation and the messaging they promote. Last season feedback from members demonstrated not all were treated equally. Don't assume that just because a buyer looks after a stud or industry leader, they will treat you the same. We have already seen the re-entry of two players last seen 14 to 15 years ago on our shores, trying this tactic to get credibility and traction. **This if nothing else, indicates the view in which some players see the coming season.**

So as farmers the below listed points are some things that you can do to try and ensure you are well informed before committing your velvet for the coming season.

- Quantity and quality of velvet produced, both individually and as an industry
- Minimise OG1 and HV1, get an understanding of what the company you supply wants
- Cut NT heads shorter, don't push the tops!
- **Get informed!!** Talk to a range of farmers regarding prices being paid rather than trusting what a buyer tells you. There was evidence of different pricing structures and payment timing between clients of some buyers last season.
- Be aware once you have taken a deposit you have no control, only promises!!
- Taking a deposit may inadvertently set the benchmark price for the coming season?
- Consider the choice of who you sell to and when (within reason): Deal with reputable buyers, who have skin in the game, versus those with just a plane ticket in their back pocket?
- Industry grading specifications are only guidelines, each company grades according to their individual market's needs. If you aren't happy consider changing.

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- **We welcome competition but not irresponsible or underhand behaviour!!**
- Timing and dispersal of surplus velvetting stags, space is tight post velvetting with growing numbers of stags and limited capacity due to trucking window and processing limitations. What would be the effects on your business if those stags can't be killed??

While each business will make its own choices based on its unique set of circumstances it is timely to point out that the choices we make as individuals not only directly affect ourselves but have a cumulative effect on the whole industry.

Your actions determine your outcomes, get informed.

Evan Potter

NZDFA Executive Committee

In the Land of Grapes: Next Gen 2025 heads to Marlborough

When the NZDFA Executive Committee were planning Next Generation for 2025, it was assumed that Marlborough would be a pretty good guess for one of the South Island's driest provinces. A late July atmospheric river had other ideas. Yet while the ground underfoot may have been a bit greasy, the days for the event, held July 31-Aug 1, were sunny and the attendees were in good spirits.

Day 1 began at Wye Hills, owned by Jason Rentoul, with a presentation by Grace

Boardman on the new DAGI (Drench and Grazing Integration) app, to be launched in spring 2025. While the app is currently targeted at sheep farmers, Grace said that deer were definitely being considered for the second phase and that DAGI would be keen to engage with deer farmers once the sheep launch had gone into market.

This was followed by an engaging discussion led by BNZ's Matt Hood, where he positioned those looking to get into farm ownership as "solution providers" to those who might be looking to ease off or head into retirement. From the use of equity partnerships and other avenues to the intangible assets that include the know-how of modern farming practices and the ability to learn new technologies quickly, Matt helped the audience see clearly what they brought to the table.



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A leisurely morning tea with chats over cheese rolls and scones, provided by Justin Stevens and family, meant we were behind time getting out onto the farm, but recent rains meant more time was spent in Jason's deer shed anyway, where remarks on recent work to the interior were common, and one attendee was said to remark, "First time I've heard a deer shed called beautiful before."

From Wye Hills, it was on to Upper Avon Farms, owned by Darren Clifford. Bought ten years ago off some French winemakers who had used it as a weekend escape, the operation is primarily a trophy hunting business but also has a deer farming element to it. This added a bit of novelty to the event, as trophy parks have not traditionally been a part of any NZDFA programme, but with its dual-function nature, it was a popular stop.

Though this may have also had something to do with the lunch spread put on by Chef Mark at the Avon Valley Lodge.

After lunch, Darren gave a bit more of a rundown off the business, discussing the newly introduced hunting block, aimed at those who want a more challenging hunt, as well as his partnership with Picton deer farmer Andrew Fishburn, who supplies 2-year-old stags to Avon Valley, which are then velvetted for two years before going out to the hunting block.

Darren covered everything from the main clientele (high net-worth North Americans) to what they want to hunt in New Zealand (red deer primarily, though fallow is gaining popularity) to the challenges and benefits of running a dual-focus operation. Darren said he believes that they are a perfect window into all that is grand about New Zealand – wide open spaces, stunning vistas, and delicious food at the end of a long day, all made from fresh, high-quality ingredients.

The day wrapped up back in Blenheim with a highly social dinner where attendees were able to relax and mingle with members of NZDFA, both Executive Committee and local Marlborough branch, as well as members of DINZ and host farmers and speakers from the day.

The next day started on a frosty morning on the outskirts of Seddon, where Executive Committee member Justin Stevens ran the group through some of the pitfalls of farming so close to town, with wandering tourists and "lost" kids on scooters just to name a few.

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Justin led the group to a handful of sections of his farm, moving from overlooking a small basin, where discussion featured waterways and sediment traps, to a plot of vines and how he grazes fawns through them to promote vine health, to a drone demonstration by Jason Rentoul outside Justin's deer shed, easily moving a mob of deer that had never seen a drone before.

From Justin's recycling sprayer used on the vines to the Gallagher TWR-5 Weigh Scale and Reader on display during morning tea to the use of drones for several farm activities, technology certainly featured as one of those common off-the-ball conversation themes throughout the two days. These are where some of the best nuggets of conversation happen, in the utes between stops or standing around chewing the fat, where those who were previously strangers shared tips based on honest experience.

The last stop of the day was Ben Morven Farm, Marlborough DFA Branch Chair Geoff Hayes' farm just outside of Blenheim. As a bit of a running theme, the previous night's rain meant the field demonstration by Marlborough District Council freshwater scientist India Hamill could not be done in any of the farm's waterways and so shifted inside the woolshed for a more theory-based presentation.

India's presentation highlighted the many ways a waterway's ecosystem can break down, as well as the key takeaway that is: "If all you have in your waterway are worms and snails, the water quality is poor; if you have

any macroinvertebrates at all – such as mayflies, stoneflies, caddisflies and crayfish/koura – then the water quality is generally pretty good.

Geoff led a Q&A session covering a number of aspects of the farm, from riparian and native planting done in recent years, to tick management, to how he grazes deer among the vines after harvest. Finally, we took a drive up to look at Geoff's paddock of Raphno, where both Geoff and Jason Rentoul spoke of their experiences with the fodder crop. (Keep an eye out for upcoming Raphno coverage after the RAP's recent trip to Invermay.)



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A big thanks to the Marlborough branch of the NZDFA and our host farmers for their hospitality and for opening their farms to us, to all of our sponsors for their support, and to all the attendees for taking the time to make the event what it is

Thank You to Grant Hasse and Russell Rudd

The Canterbury/West Coast branch of the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association would like to thank and recognise **Grant Hasse and Russell Rudd** for their many years of hard work and support. Both have been central to the branch and the wider deer industry, always willing to share their knowledge and lend a hand when needed.

"Recently, Grant and Russell chose to step down from the committee due to other personal commitments. They did so confidently, knowing the branch is in great hands with a fresh and enthusiastic team. We are grateful that they remain supportive and in close contact with the committee, continuing to offer their guidance whenever needed. Grant and Russell have given many years of support to our branch and industry. Their steady leadership has made a real difference to many. We're proud as a committee of the work we're doing now and look forward to building on the great groundwork they've laid. With the new committee's clear focus and energy, we're confident the branch will continue to grow and serve farmers well into the future."

- *Rachael Inch, Chair
Canterbury/West Coast NZDFA*

Since their departure, the Canterbury-West Coast committee has come together with renewed energy and clarity. As farmers ourselves, over the past few months, we've reflected on local and global trends, discussed openly what works and what doesn't, and set a clear future focus to better serve our members, consumers and the wider industry.

The branch committee is strong, diverse, and united. We're committed to:

- Keeping communication positive and constructive across the sector
- Building strong, lasting networks and relationships

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- Being a trusted, inclusive group ready to listen to farmers
- Providing strong and effective advocacy within the industry
- Sharing useful education, tools, and resources
- Maintaining influence and credibility as one of the largest NZDFA branches in the South Island

On behalf of the Canterbury branch, thank you again to Grant and Russell for everything you've done. Your ongoing support is really appreciated as we move forward with fresh ideas and a strong commitment to our farming community.

Change to the Transport QA Standards

There has been a change to the Transport QA Standards for 2025/ 2026 and beyond:

The Transport QA committee has asked that there be a clearly defined date range regarding the transport of stags to slaughter. The agreed standard is:

4.9. TRANSPORT OF STAGS

Standard

- 4.9.1. Stags **MUST** not be sent to slaughter after 14 February or before 14 July.
- 4.9.2. Only stags under 2 years of age can be transported to DSPs during the roar.

It has been agreed that there will be a phase implementation of this date change to 14 February in that:

For the 2026 season, stags can be “moved to slaughter up to and including 21 February 2026”.

For 2027 stags must not be moved to slaughter after 14 February.

This standard was agreed after considerable discussion regarding farmer and driver health and safety, as well as stag welfare.

Please note that these standards do not apply to trophy stags which have their own transport QA standards.

Noticeboard

Code of the Welfare release and subsequent changes.

The updated code of welfare for deer was released this week and will come into effect on 8 September. It is the first of the updated livestock codes of welfare to be published.

All those who farm and handle deer – which include trophy parks and game estates – are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the updated code.

This is the first substantive update to the code since it was first published in 2007, other than minor amendments in 2018. The updated code reflects advances in animal welfare science, farming systems, management practices and changing public attitudes.

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While there are more than 60 new minimum standards, along with 4 changes to existing minimum standards, most additions and changes are about tightening language and providing greater clarity. Given the high level of animal welfare in the sector, these should not affect current deer systems significantly.

The Code was developed by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC), with feedback provided by DINZ, NZDFA, farmers, vets and transporters, before it was reviewed by deer expert Dr. Geoff Asher and then passed on to Minister Hoggard to sign into effect.

View the MPI Code of Welfare and Summary of changes to the code on the online version of this article.

Deer fencing advice for coastal farms

We are busy developing the local deer industry in Mauritius (Rusa deer). It has big potential, but we are facing a problem with coastal farms on the south of the island which are exposed to sea winds and the fencing that we use, despite being heavily galvanised does not last long. This is obviously a huge cost to have to replace the fences every 3-4 years and is preventing the expansion in those areas.

As you have pretty similar conditions on your coast, or even worse, can you share what you use and how you deal with it?

Have you tried polypropylene fences?

Kind regards,

Pierre NOEL

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Help us improve access to (agriculture) training

You probably see a lot of surveys, but completing this one could improve access to essential training for your industry.

We want to understand how easy it is for people like you to find education and training opportunities in your industry and in your region. If training isn't visible or easy to find, it could be stopping you from making full use of what's available in the vocational education and training system.

Please take our quick 4-question survey. Your feedback will help us to improve how you and others find essential workforce training.

Ngā mihi,

John Henare

Engagement and Partnerships Lead

Muka Tangata - People, Food and Fibre
Workforce Development Council

To take the survey, the link can be found on the online version of this article.

Record-breaking applications highlight urgent need for GFF farm trainers

Growing Future Farmers (GFF) is celebrating a record-breaking 150 student applications for its 2026 intake – a clear sign that young people are embracing farming as a meaningful and rewarding career path.

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This surge in interest, however, brings an urgent opportunity. With demand exceeding placements by nearly 90 percent, GFF is now calling on experienced farmers across King Country, Otago and Canterbury to come on board as farm trainers.

GFF connects young people with experienced farmers to learn on the land. Students gain real skills, confidence and resilience through hands-on farm experience, mentoring, and structured support. Over two years, they develop essential livestock and agribusiness skills while contributing to daily farm operations four days a week, supported by formal learning one day a week.

The benefits of training go both ways. Many farmers who take on GFF students say they gain fresh perspectives, renewed motivation, and stronger team culture on-farm. GFF offers full support to its trainers, including dedicated Student Success Advisors, and substantial help with admin and training coordination.

GFF invites farmers to get in touch for a no-pressure chat to learn more about becoming a trainer.

More information is available at www.growingfuturefarmers.co.nz/farm-trainers.

About Growing Future Farmers

GFF is a charity that provides the opportunity for young people to enter the sheep, beef and deer industry with the confidence of supported training and development. GFF offers an industry respected, employer-led

career pathway that enables motivated young people to progress in their career.

Tasman Farmers – Primary Sector Recovery Grant

MPI has confirmed on Tuesday a Primary Sector Recovery Grant of \$340,000 for farmers, growers, foresters and fishers in the Tasman region.

Applications can be for the following but not limited to:

- Cleaning up silt and debris on production land
- Removing debris in and around aquaculture farms
- Removing fallen trees from boundary fences, riparian zones, and key access ways
- Clearing key tracks
- Infrastructure identified as being essential for production, but where costs cannot be met by insurance.
- Material costs of fences and culverts
- Costs of farm or other machinery to undertake recovery activities

Note: Applications can be retrospective!!

Applications close: 29 August 2025

To apply, the link can be found on the online version of this article.

Joke of the month

- Husband: Did you know Old McDonald's farm has been taken over by Artificial Intelligence?
Wife: AI?

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Husband: Al.

Wife: Oh.

- A Machine Learning algorithm walks into a bar. The bartender asks "What will you have?" The algorithm says "What's everyone else having?"
- Why was the computer cold?
It left its Windows open.

Visit the deernz.org website to view information about these events.

Events

- Elk Wapiti Society of New Zealand Online Stock Sale
- Getting to Know the NZ Farm Assurance Plan - Greymouth, 20 August
- Getting to Know the NZ Farm Assurance Plan - Hokitika, 21 August
- Wormwise for deer - Mossburn, 26 August
- Wormwise for deer - Turangi, 27 August
- Wormwise for deer - Winton, 28 August
- Elk/Wapiti Zoom Discussion Group (Achieving Young Stock Growth Targets) - Online, 9 September
- Pāmu Farm Open Day at Eweburn Station - Te Anau, 30 October
- North Island Velvet Competition - Te Awamutu, 29 November
- National Velvet Competition and Awards Night - Invercargill, 11 December

If you have an event that would be of interest to the deer farming industry, please email info@deernz.org with details.