



## SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER 2020

### 2020 JUST ANOTHER YEAR – YEAH RIGHT!

Warm greetings from us here at Glenview. We sincerely hope that the arrival of Spring heralds the start of a much better farming season than the last one, given that so far 2020 has been anything but 'just another year'!

The ripple effects of the global pandemic quickly reached even our shores and 'normal service' as we knew it 6 months ago is no longer the case. Our hearts go out to those whose health or livelihoods have been badly affected and we hope they and the rest of the team of 5 million can somehow hang in there until an effective vaccine becomes available. So far it appears that Dr Bloomfield and his team have done a pretty reasonable job or have we just been very lucky?

The farming sector has of course been fortunate to not have been impacted too severely compared to those associated with hospitality and tourism. Significant price reductions for what we sell and at times clogged supply lines have probably been the main issues, but at least we have been able to go to work each day and keep the wheels turning.

One positive that did come out of the Covid crisis for farming was the 'essential industry' status and acknowledgement by the Government that farming still forms the backbone of the NZ economy. Almost overnight the body language from the banking sector became way more 'farmer friendly' as it got a stark reminder that farming and land was probably a much better bet than a lot of the urban commercial lending that they had recently become a lot more focused on. Long may that continue to be their mindset!

### DROUGHT

Concerns around Covid barely registered in the minds of farmers throughout much of the country during the autumn as they grappled with drought. For many this was a drought like no other in living memory in terms of its severity. And that is no small statement given that the east coast of NZ is prone to drought and there have been some real shockers over the years.

Central Hawkes Bay was probably the worst affected region and the extreme conditions there just got worse and worse as the autumn played out – that area was scorched for at least 6 months on end and over that time the pressure on farmers and livestock became quite acute. The colour of that drought ravaged landscape finally had a tinge of green in it by mid winter but there was negligible feed and the battle was far from over.

Reports of people selling or having to kill (given there was no store market) their ewes scanned with twins were not uncommon as they faced the reality that they would not have the feed to lamb them on. Farming could not get much more desperate than that!

We have spoken to a good number of people from up that way who have been battling since the beginning of the year. Despite being mentally exhausted their resolve to get through this has never wavered and they have continued to make the tough calls when they have needed to around sourcing expensive supplementary feed (often from as far away as mid Canterbury), procurement of grazing from outside their region and quitting capital stock. We admire their courage and tenacity and will continue to be conscious of what they are going through as we head into this next season.

### Desperate situations require desperate measures

Our summer/autumn drought was undoubtedly one of the most severe we have encountered in the 40 years we have been farming here, although I can recall another a bit over 20 years ago that was almost as bad. That necessitated sending ram hoggets away for grazing (the only time that has ever been done) and the liquidation of our entire commercial breeding cow herd.



*Delivering the daily rations to 2ths - March 2020. A common and unremarkable scene on many farms but a completely unfamiliar sight at Glenview.*

This time there was little or no prospect of finding grazing elsewhere given that so much of the country was also in drought mode. By February we could see that the situation was quickly becoming serious and it was apparent that our normal dry summer strategy involving creative grazing management and leaving stock to tough it out was not going to work on this occasion. Given that we were determined to avoid having to sell capital stock we quickly realized that our only option was to try to supplementary feed our ewes.

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*Still delivering the daily rations to mixed age ewes on May 15th. This was the last day we fed Romney ewes, having kept going until sufficient feed had built up elsewhere.*

Prior to this autumn we had never fed any form of supplement to our sheep (Romney or South Suffolk) and we had real doubts about whether we could even get them to eat baleage. We decided to give baleage a try because we had already purchased a reasonable quantity in order to get our cows and calves through. Many more unit loads were ordered over the following weeks!

Despite starting later than we should have 98% of ewes from both breeds developed a taste for our fairly average grass baleage quite quickly, just in time for tupping and it was a life saver! It was such a massive relief to be able to provide sufficient sustenance for hungry ewes while in the grips of a drought that didn't feel as if it would ever end. Even though it was very time consuming it was nonetheless quite therapeutic to be able to provide a lifeline to that portion of the flock for the first time.

We didn't attempt to train any lambs on to baleage – they instead were given as much scope as possible, good water and access to any limited grazing in gullies/drains etc. Thankfully they coped very well.

Due to our complete lack of experience with feeding sheep baleage we had no idea that it was common practice to also feed maize, barley or sheep nuts in addition. So our ewes had to be content with a baleage only diet which appeared to be sufficient. We were feeding 1 bale/approx 300 ewes/day which equated to 30c/hd/day which we thought was relatively affordable.

Despite no grain or nuts alongside the baleage we reckoned that the 2ths at least looked happy and healthy throughout the 10 weeks that they were locked down on baleage although it appeared that their weight gain was slower than what it would normally be on grass. The mixed age ewes on the other hand clearly did gain weight more readily over the same period and looked good throughout.

**Final word on our (Wairarapa) drought. 😊**

Pleased to report that locally our drought did end and in the best possible way. Approx. 10mm of rain was forecast right at the end of March – instead we got closer to 200mm over a 3 day period! The landscape gradually changed colour over the following weeks although the feed was quite sluggish to come away – but at least we had turned a corner. No rain throughout April but finally got the follow up at the end of that month and the feed finally took off.



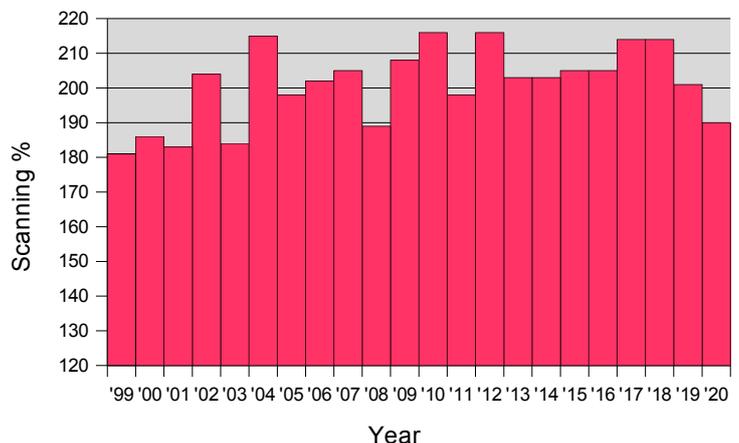
*Romney ewes heading home for crutching August 2020.*

We had all been pinning our hopes on a kind winter and we have certainly had one. Warm, fine, sunny weather has predominated and we have been farming with a smile throughout. The lack of mud has been an utter joy and it has felt as if spring arrived 6 weeks early. Of course we are more than a little concerned about the implications further down the track but for now we are just enjoying the 'now'. Our lambing started last week and so we are naturally wanting the good weather to hold for another month – then it can rain.

**ROMNEY PREGNANCY SCANNING RESULTS**

Despite taking a bit of a hit while being trained on to baleage and their somewhat meagre rations the ewes ended up tupping reasonably well. The m.a. ewes scanned 202% which was pleasing but the 2ths were a little disappointing at 159%. Normally the 2ths scan around 175% after lambing as hoggets so clearly the drought had an impact.

The m.a. ewes that Matt Olds farms for us on his Mikimiki block (15 mins NW of Masterton) also scanned 202% which was very pleasing as they got no supplement but did have a bit more room and scope up



there. Over the whole flock the pregnancy scanning came out at just on 190% which I guess we should be happy enough with given the season.

In late April we gambled on getting a kind winter and made the decision to do what we have always done and mate all the ewe hoggets (including hoggets out of hoggets). They later delivered a creditable 107% scanning result. As usual the ewe hoggets were mated to Romney sires and we hope their progeny will once again make a valuable contribution to the growth of the flock and enhancement of our breeding programme.

We should point out that all of our Romney lambs (except triplets) are born on unfertilised hill country (no fertiliser for over 30 years). The ewe lambs are weaned back onto similar country and are later tupped as hoggets on similar country. They are then wintered and lambled on similar country.

This regime certainly applies a lot of pressure to our breeding programme and ensures that only those females that have proved they have a sufficiently tough constitution and can perform in that environment are retained as replacements. Those ewes will then spend the rest of their lives on the same type of hill country apart from brief periods spent on easier country during lambing if they have triplets.

### WEANING WEIGHT IS 'KING'

Lamb weaning weights have always been a huge focus in our breeding programme along with ewe conception and lamb survival. We have always held the view that in order to maximise profitability sheep breeding operations need to wean as many lambs as possible and lambs that are good and heavy.

This of course enables a good proportion of lambs to be drafted prime off their mothers with the balance being good enough to finish in a relatively short time frame or sell in forward store condition and attract a premium.

The most profitable sheep breeding operations are those that are able to unload the maximum number of lambs profitably at weaning as lambs grow fastest from birth through to weaning, eat the least amount of grass over that period and require the least input (docking & 1 drench).



*A selection of triplet lambs reared as triplets prior to shearing Feb 2020. These lambs had an impressive weaning weight of 40.2kg (adj. 100 days) after being preferentially fed (grass). This was 1kg above the flock average.*

The need to extract the maximum value from the lamb crop at weaning is even more important in summer dry/drought prone areas and it would seem that an increasing proportion of the country is now falling into that category. Properties in these areas need to destock at the onset of summer in order to be able to feed replacement ewe lambs and ewes adequately to set them up for the next season.

There is no doubt in our minds that weaning weight is 'King', especially in summer dry hill country environments and we have found that if lambs are good at weaning they will continue to be good thereafter even if they do have to cope with adversity over the summer/autumn period. Conversely if lambs are poor at weaning, farming them will be hard work from that point on!

### ROMNEYS DELIVER AGAIN AT WEANING

We were again delighted to find that our Romney lamb weaning weights (adj. 100 days) were again impressive last season despite the dry conditions. More lambs were weighed than ever from here and from Matt's Mikimiki operation and they came out at 39.2kg, just behind the record result that was achieved 2 seasons ago.

The graph illustrates that the trend has been upwards over the last decade or so and has steadily built from what was a respectable starting point. All the lambs at home (incl. triplets) get only 1 drench in their first 5 months (at approx. 100 days) while Matt's get 2 and the lambing % is normally in the 150-165% range (unshepherded).

For the most part the flock has been run on the same country and in the same way for as long as we have been doing this (30 yrs).

Therefore any consolidated lift in performance such as weaning weight would have to be due to genetic influence. This excites us not only because it validates our breeding programme but also because we know that our clients will reap the benefits as their flocks breed in the same direction.

Clearly there will be a limit to how far we can lift these levels of performance but if we can consistently wean our lambs (90% multiples) at an average weight of 39kg (adj. 100 days) or better then we would indeed be very happy.

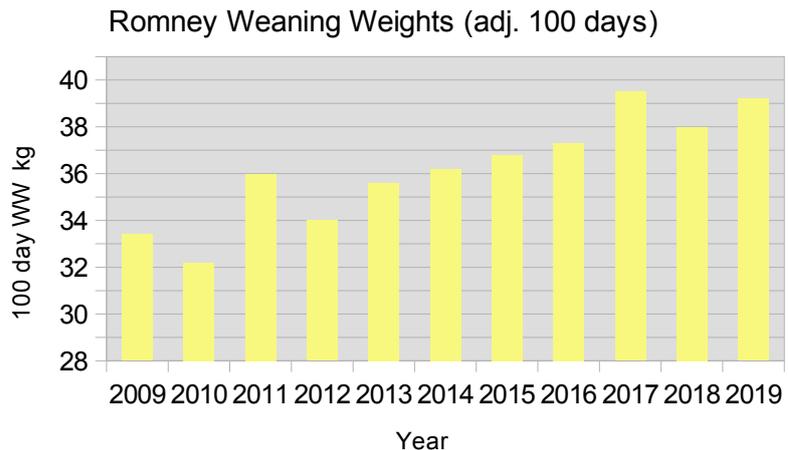
### CLIENTS CONTINUE TO IMPRESS AND INSPIRE

We always look forward to meeting up with clients at ram selling time. In many instances it is the only face to face interaction we have each year and so we relish the opportunity to do more listening than talking and hearing how things have played out on both a human and farming level over the previous 12 months.

We are fortunate to have the chance to catch up with people from not just the lower North Island but also from further afield throughout the country. Many have been regulars for some time and have sat around different smoko tables as our selling venue has moved a couple of times over the years and we have enjoyed hearing about some of their trials and tribulations (often humorous) and of course the successes.

We have quite a diverse range of clients in terms of where they farm, how they farm, scale and age. We continue to be impressed by clients older than ourselves who run much larger operations than ours very successfully – and yet we think we are busy! They clearly must run a lot faster than we do throughout the year and they inspire us to keep striving.

At the other end of the age spectrum we had the pleasure last season of meeting up with a number of particularly impressive young farmers who were just kicking off their farming careers. In some instances they had held down 2 jobs for a number of years in order to get on to the farming ladder as they didn't have any family capital behind them. In other instances they were sons or daughters of farmers looking to buy into or grow family operations, or were managers or stock managers. In every case they were polite, modest, good judges and handlers of stock, but more than anything were passionate about farming and determined to succeed.



Therefore if our clients are anything to go by farming is clearly in good hands now and will obviously continue to be over the coming decades.

### Other facial eczema strategies

Barb & I inevitably learn a great deal from many of the conversations we have with clients during the ram selling season. Last year for example we learnt that a number of people who farm in FE prone areas blanket spray large areas of their hill country with fungicide using a helicopter in order to mitigate their FE risk. They told us this strategy was very cost effective and had worked well for them over the years providing it was done at the appropriate time. Normally they would expect to get approx 6 weeks protection even in bad seasons when neighbours around them who hadn't sprayed or used zinc capsules were having problems.

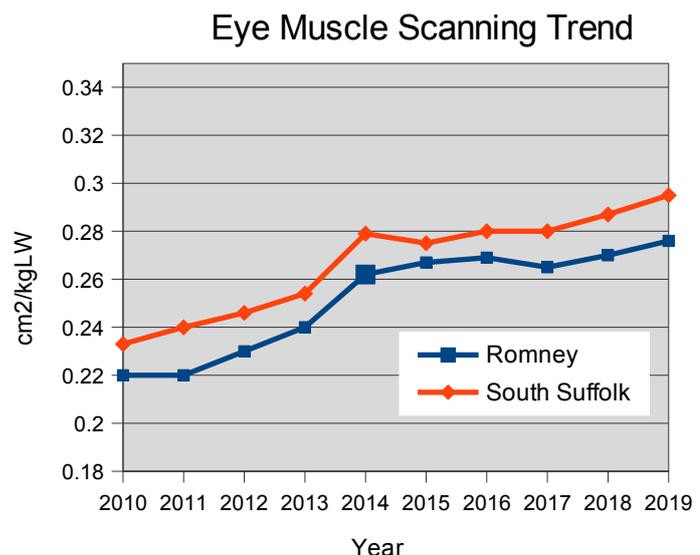
FE is not something that historically has been widespread in our area but is being talked about a lot more nowadays as its prevalence seems to be increasing. As our rams are now going into FE fringe areas we have needed to take a lot more interest in this issue and incorporate some FE tolerant genetics into our breeding programme, although it is a long journey.

It was encouraging however to read about a Beef & Lamb funded initiative by Ag Research to develop a simple and affordable blood test that would potentially allow entire flocks (including females) to be screened, whereas currently only a very small sample of rams are tested. If developed this would speed up breeding programmes around FE significantly and fast track a process that currently takes decades.

### EYE MUSCLE SCANNING

We are pleased to see that the eye muscle (loin) area of both breeds is continuing to trend upwards. We have eye muscle scanned all potential sale rams in October since 1996 and the benefits from that have slowly compounded over that time.

We are ramping this up from now on by moving the scanning date forward to May when an even larger proportion of the ram hoggets will be scanned. This will provide quite a bit more data that can be fed back into SIL and generate BV's with greater accuracy. This year's EMA scanning has not been included in the graph due to the change in scanning date.



*South Suffolk ewe hoggets prior to weaning with some very useful lambs at foot. The conception and lambing performance of the SS ewe hoggets has improved markedly in recent seasons and a significant proportion of their progeny are now retained as replacements or sold as 2th rams. Some of the lambs pictured above produced an EMA/kg LW well above the flock average of .33cm<sup>2</sup>/kgLW when scanned in May this year.*

## RAM ORDER FORMS

We would appreciate it if you could get your ram order form back to us asap or by **Monday 5<sup>th</sup> October** at the latest please. Not only does that guarantee your ram pick but it also enables us to quantify how many rams we have available for new clients. An approximate indication of your requirements is sufficient as numbers can be fine tuned at picking time if desired.

When we receive your ram order (hopefully?) we will assume you wish to continue picking at the same price level as previously unless you advise us otherwise and we will schedule you in accordingly. We (probably Barb) will ring you prior to the usual picking time and arrange a day and a time that suits you and we will go from there. As always we very much look forward to catching up then.

Barb is telling me that I have rambled on for long enough and it is time that we got this newsletter in the post. She is probably right – before we know it we'll be into November and getting rams ready for your perusal. Pleased to be able to report that all of the rams (Romneys and South Suffolks) have come through the season in good shape and will hopefully have the right combination of good looks and good figures when you get to see them.



*Ram hoggets waiting to be shorn Sept 2020. They had not been drenched for 12 weeks prior to this.*

There is a lot to do between now and then so I had better get out the door and start doing it. We both wish you all the best for the remainder of lambing and hope the number and weight of lambs at docking and weaning exceeds your expectations.

Good luck and good farming!

Kind regards

Geoff