



SPRING NEWSLETTER 2022

Spring greetings to you once again from us here at Glenview. We trust that you have managed to come through the winter in reasonably good shape despite the usual (and unusual) on farm challenges and the many issues currently challenging us from outside the farm gate as well.

We do hope that spring has kicked in properly at your place by now and your mud has receded and your grass has lifted along with your spirits and optimism for the farming year that lies ahead.

Sadly the spring has been marred by the passing of Queen Elizabeth II after a record 70 year reign as Head of State of the UK and 14 other Commonwealth nations. Her death and funeral gripped not just those in the UK but millions of people around the world. At least 400,000 people are estimated to have flowed past her coffin at an average queuing time of 12 hours and would be a measure of their affection, gratitude and respect.

There would not be many recipients of this newsletter who have ever known any other monarch in their lifetime and as such she has been a wonderful 'constant' in our lives. As a child I can recall my grandmother and mother always lining up to watch the Queen deliver her Christmas message. In one of her more recent messages I can also recall the Queen using her famous line 'annus horribilus' when describing a particularly distressing year for the royal family.

Unfortunately 2022 would probably be described by many as an 'annus horribilus', particularly the people in war torn Ukraine and the victims of flood in Pakistan. Closer to home it has been a horrible year for people in storm and flood affected areas such as Gisborne, West Coast, Nelson/Marlborough, Northland and others.

Like everybody else we were shocked by the pictures and the coverage and we winced at the scale of the damage and the extent to which properties and infrastructure was torn apart. We extend our best wishes to anyone who has been affected to any extent by these weather events and hope by now you have been able to stitch things back together and are operative once again.

LOOKING BACK

By comparison our part of the Wairarapa has been very fortunate over the last 12 months. We had a reasonably kind spring last year (only 24hrs of really bad weather) which enabled us to chalk up one of our better lambing %'s here at home (174%). We should point out though that all Matt's triplet scanned ewes are brought back here to lamb so our potential is always higher.

For those of you who are not familiar with our set up Matt Olds (and partner Sarah) farm 900 of our stud ewes on their property up at Tiraumea – approx 1½ hours from here in the Tararua district, halfway between Alfredton and Pongaroa.

By contrast, Matt had a miserable time during lambing last year and copped 3 days of continuous, cold southerly rain which significantly impacted on their lambing. Nonetheless they still docked 140% which contributed to a respectable overall figure of 148%.

We had a very kind summer by Wairarapa standards with significant rain in late Feb. and a follow up a month later in time to flush ewes prior to tupping which would be a first for a while! Throughout the autumn and early winter we continued to grow a lot of feed and up until that point we would never have been more comfortably off.

From that point on though it has however been a bit of a battle due to the unbelievably wet ground conditions – the unseasonably wet late summer/early autumn finally caught up with us and we have been floating ever since. Moving man and beast around the farm has been extremely challenging and downright frustrating, but I know I won't be telling any of you anything you don't already know because our farm doesn't have the monopoly on mud and many of you will have had a far worse time of it. The good news from this end is that, to date, we have not had any major slips although some big cracks have opened up.



Romney ram hoggets taking the long way home prior to shearing to avoid the worst of the mud!

The other good news is that we have nearly finished our Romney lambing and to this point weather related lamb losses have been low. We are hoping that Matt has had a similarly good run that will perhaps contribute towards a really good overall %. We have just started lambing our South Suffolks and Romney ewe hoggets and it appears that our good weather run might be coming to an end with southerly rain forecast for this Friday and Saturday, so we are bracing ourselves for that. Them's the breaks!

REDUCING METHANE

At the outset I should point out that there would probably be no farmer in the country less qualified or less knowledgeable than I am to venture an opinion on this complex issue. Like many others, I suspect, I have developed an ongoing sinking feeling and a certain amount of despair in response to the legislation and associated methane tax that is soon to be imposed on us.

From what we read and hear it would appear that the whole concept is based on very dubious science and at best is merely political and academic tokenism that of course won't make a blind bit of difference to the state of the planet. Nonetheless, like it or not, it would appear that we are all going to have to fall into line and pay a significant annual levy that will be felt the most by extensively run, low environmental impact sheep and beef operations.

Given that there are no meaningful technologies in the pipeline to help reduce livestock emissions on these types of properties in the short to medium term, the only way to achieve the 10% reduction by 2030 will be to reduce the amount of feed grown and eaten by livestock - ie more trees and less stock.

It would appear therefore that in order to maintain production and profitability we will need our stock to be 10% more productive - ie our sheep will need to produce more lambs, heavier lambs, have a lower wastage rate and eat a similar amount of pasture/head as they did previously that is less reliant on fertiliser and receives no N.

So as ram breeders we obviously need to keep the foot down and continue to focus on breeding sheep that produce more from less – business as usual then!

Finally I should acknowledge Keith Woodford's excellent article that appeared in the Farmers Weekly 13/6/22 which I kept for reference.

DAG UPDATE

At the risk of stating the obvious, daggy sheep are a real turn off. Accordingly we have spent over 30 years trying to eliminate them from our farming landscape and while that is still a work in progress we have at least made significant gains in that time.

We have been dag scoring lambs, hoggets and ewes throughout that period and have had a zero tolerance for sheep that were habitually daggy no matter how good they might have been in other respects.

Over the years we have found that this trait is quite heritable (approx 25%) and the progress we have made has been very evident. A recent B+LNZ Genetics low input sheep progeny trial run on Orari Gorge Station (South Canterbury) also confirmed that dags are heritable and so it is surprising that not many breeders select against dags.



Ram hoggets coming home for shearing late August - 80% requiring no dagging.

Yes we do still get daggy sheep (damn it), but a lot fewer than we used to, and yes we acknowledge that different feed and different country can influence dagginess from time to time. However, despite that, genetics can go a long way towards offsetting that potential.



In lamb ewe hoggets waiting to be pre lamb crutched in Sept. They have not had a handpiece on them since mid Feb. when they were shorn.

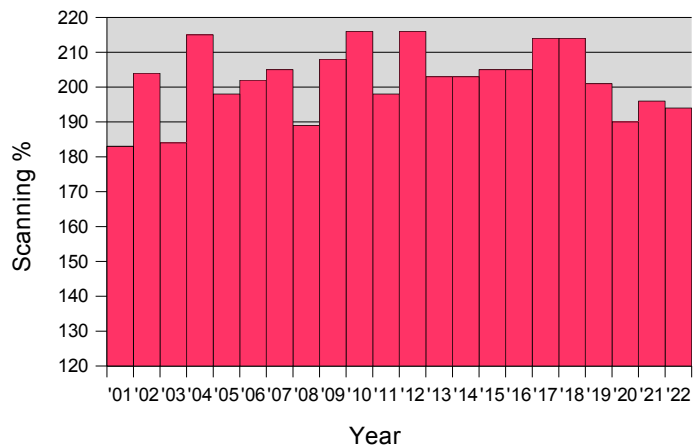
We currently dag score (0-5 range) all lambs prior to shearing in February (after receiving only 1 drench prior) and again in August and September as ram hoggets and ewe hoggets respectively. We also dag score all the ewes that lamb here at home when they are pre lamb crutched.

All our shearing is carried out in Feb and March (lambs and ewes) so a period of 6-7 months lapses between dag scores without any maintenance dagging being done during that time. This year 80% of the ram hoggets had a 0-1 dag score (no dagging required) prior to shearing in late August. 83% of the ewe hoggets had a 0-1 dag score when they were pre-lamb crutched in September and 89% of the ewes at home had a 0-1 dag score when they were pre-lamb crutched in August.

MAKING THE MOST OUT OF TRIPLETS

At the outset we should make the point that we DO NOT seek triplets here, nor are we strong advocates for triplets on hill country. If we could choose we would, of course, prefer every ewe to have twins.

However the reality is that approx. 15% of ewes will conceive triplets in flocks that scan 190-200%. As ram breeders we believe that our flock needs to scan at around that level in order to have a positive impact on client's flocks when they are wanting a lift in fertility. This would be one of the requirements of more than 70% of our clients when they first contact us.



Background

Up until about 15 years ago we experienced the same disappointment and frustrations that many others have with triplet lambs, despite lambing them separately and feeding them preferentially.



Day old triplets off to a good start.

There was always the odd set that was impressive but more often we would end up with 1 good lamb (36kg), 1 average lamb (29kg) and 1 poor lamb (24kg). Subsequently very few were kept beyond weaning which represented a significant annual loss of potentially valuable genetics.

However we kept plugging away and all of a sudden things started to improve quite significantly despite continuing to manage them in much the same way. We have put that down to having repeatedly used a proportion of top performing triplet sires (reared as triplets) in our breeding programme over the years while continuing to further enhance the mothering, milking and lamb growth across the entire flock year on year.

Nowadays

In a good season our triplet scanned ewes now dock around 230% (essentially unshepherded) although that can drop back to 210% in a poor season when bad weather has had an impact. Most lambs that are reared as triplets weigh 33-40kg (adj. 100days) at weaning with some really good sets averaging 40kg after having access to some of our better country and 5-10yr old pasture.

Our management of triplets

This has been slightly refined over the years with the emphasis on simplicity and practicality:

- Leave triplet scanned ewes running with twin scanned ewes up until 2-3 weeks prior to lambing.
- Then vaccinate/crutch and avoid driving long distances.
- Take pressure off and give access to better quality feed leading into lambing.
- Set stock a couple of days prior to start of lambing onto sufficient feed at a light stocking rate of around 6/ha max. In order to maximise lambs survival at birth and minimise mismothering we have found that triplet ewes and lambs need space.
- Essentially leave alone during lambing (as we do with the balance of the flock) but regularly view from a distance in order to roll cast ewes over and assist/euthanise where required. We don't foster lambs.
- We only have a very limited area of 'better country' so for some time now 50% of our triplet scanned ewes have lambed quite happily up on the unfertilised hills but on higher covers.
- Prior to docking we shed/separate all of the full sets of triplets and they are given an identifying ear mark and preferentially fed (just grass) through to weaning. The triplets being reared as twins are then run with the twins up on the hills from docking onwards.



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 downside of triplets

- Obviously triplet scanned ewes need more feed and space 3 weeks out from lambing and those that rear 3 lambs need better feed through to weaning, initially more for the sake of the ewes, then more for the sake of the lambs.
- The ewe death rate is usually higher than with twins as you would expect but we have not found it to be excessive.
- And of course there are always more dead lambs to be picked up in the triplet paddocks – lambs born dead, mismothered, misadventure etc – but with more lambs being born there is always more potential for things to go wrong. Nonetheless at birth 90% of our triplet born lambs would be of a good size and have plenty of vigour.

The upside of triplets (for us)

- For the last decade or so our triplets have consistently delivered a lambing% 40% ahead of the twins ie in a good year 230% v 190%, and it is very rare to get 190% with twins when all ewe deaths are taken into account!
- If fed appropriately triplet lambs at weaning are on a par with twins.

- Utilisation of quality genetics that are a product of exceptional mothering, milking, lamb growth and thrift despite having received significantly less milk. Any lamb that ends up with a top weaning weight after being reared as a triplet and goes on and ticks every other box has to be a bit special.
- After incorporating triplet born and reared sires into our ram team alongside twins we have not seen the proportion of triplet scanned ewes increase over the decades. It has remained steady at around 15%.
- It is always a buzz to see mobs of 50 ewes with 150 well grown lambs at foot at weaning.
- It has been a huge thrill to see such a significant improvement in our triplet reared lambs over the last 15 years or so given that it has been largely due to improving genetics. Our management has not changed much during that period.
- By contrast the performance of our South Suffolk triplets is currently probably where the Romneys were about 15 years ago as we have not focused on that feature to the same extent in their breeding programme.
- Triplet need not necessarily be a dirty word!

SOUTH SUFFOLK UPDATE

While on a smaller scale, the South Suffolk flock continues to evolve, grow and improve in parallel with our Romney operation. We are continuing to build the South Suffolk numbers (over 300 ewes mated this autumn, now one of the larger flocks in the country) in response to the growing demand for rams and in order to breed an even larger number of progeny from which to select ewe replacements and potential sale rams.



South Suffolk ewes on their way home prior to set stocking for lambing.

Our South Suffolk focus continues to place an emphasis on breeding easy doing, medium to large framed, wide, deep, wedge shaped sheep that also have wide, deep well developed back ends. We have also eye muscle scanned our ram hoggets for over 25 years (more recently done in May) to ensure that our sheep have large, meaty loins.

We are somewhat obsessive about feet shape, pasterns and leg structure, and whenever we evaluate sheep (or cattle for that matter) we always start at the feet and work our way



Pinegrove 370/17 with ewes and again in the next photo.

up from there. All potential sale rams are tipped over prior to sale to check feet shape (no trimming) and are scored from 1-5. Normally only 1's and 2's are offered for sale and thankfully we almost never find 4's or 5's! Historically there has probably not been as much emphasis put on feet as there should have been by terminal sire breeders and so we have had to work doubly hard over the years to source outside bloodlines that have had a history of good feet.

To that end we were delighted to be able to acquire a quarter share in Pinegrove 370/17, a 5 year old ram that was bred in North Canterbury. He has bred particularly well throughout his life having produced multiple stud sires, and has extremely



good feet, especially for a ram of his age. The main motivation for the group to acquire the ram was to establish genetic linkages on SIL and enable the individual studs to benchmark. He was constantly on the move last autumn visiting the four North Island studs, finally finishing up in Rotorua where he has spent the winter. We will be watching his progeny with interest when they start hitting the ground in a few days time.

A SHOUT OUT TO MEAT PROCESSORS AND TRUCKIES

From the start of the pandemic it was and still is extremely challenging, pressured and stressful for everyone involved in these two industries. Yet despite the colossal issues they have still managed to keep the wheels turning (figuratively and literally) albeit more slowly and help keep us all in business.

This has involved trucking and killing lots of small, part lines in order to keep at least some stock moving off farms which logistically would have complicated things enormously. Of course the current state of many country roads will be making their task even more difficult not to mention expensive.

All our stock are processed through Alliance and Ross Karam has played a blinder throughout this time constantly bending over backwards to somehow make things work and his excellent communication has been much appreciated. Many thanks guys!

AND A SHOUT OUT TO OUR CLIENTS

Thank you all once again – we, of course, very much appreciate your ongoing business and interaction. We are especially grateful for repeat business which tends to validate our sheep and gives us the opportunity to continue building on some very good relationships that often become good friendships.

We hope that we can continue to do that in a few weeks time. Could you please return your ram order form (post or email) by the **24th October at the latest**. Once we have heard from you Barb will be in touch by email and later by phone to organise a day and a time that suits.

As usual – good luck and good farming.

Regards

Geoff

