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Motu-nui Romneys

Newsletter
October 2013

Riding the 2012 wave

As the old story goes, nature has a way of working things out in the end. It's just a pity it has taken the shine off the bank account in between.

This has been a very tough year for many farmers. Some escaped the worst of the drought but were still stung with poor returns. Thank heck for a kind late autumn/early winter to get us back on track again. We all need good lambing weather now and a kind spring to make up for the lower scanning percentages that most have experienced.

By what I have seen in my travels around the traps the farmers in the worst-hit areas escaped better if they acted early (lessons learned from previous dry spells) and put good plans in place to feed capital stock. Many, including ourselves, have never before been in the situation of having to feed out. Not something many enjoyed, with a steep learning curve in sheep nutrition.

On the upside, many sheep have now been trained to take hard feed, something I see becoming more and more common in critical stages of the ewes' breeding cycle to produce the results that the seasons are not allowing us to achieve. Balancing sheep nutrition is very difficult on hill country. How do we get our ewes to lamb on covers of 1500+ with a balanced diet?

I am very pleased with the results most of our clients have achieved in trying conditions. Ewe scanning has generally been 10-15% down, remembering this is on the back of one of the kindest summers on record the year prior.

Our own scanning went very well considering the condition of the ewes, with 170% MA and 165% for the 2ths.

Our biggest problem during the drought was water; we were forced to bring our stock off the hills as all creeks and dams dried up. At that stage we started feeding out, probably too late but we were forced to do something. We then had to find 40 paddocks to set stock in for single mating, a huge challenge for both man and beast. We have since put in two good sized dams, hopefully going some way to fixing our water problems.

I suppose that brings me to the question that I am often asked, what our breeding objectives are, and are we heading in the right direction considering what we have been through?

To breed a ewe that weans its bodyweight on genuine hill country, with ability to hold their condition from weaning to mating and produce multiple lambs the following season. I am pleased to say we are definitely heading in the right direction for breeding hill country

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genetics. 72% of our male lambs could have been drafted to the works at weaning. That was after a poor spring. I have preferred to let the sheep do the talking, in this case, results speak for themselves.

This year was a classic example of why we have to produce lambs 30+kgs at weaning. If not, we will be put to the sword by meat companies and finishers. Most finishers these days don't want store lambs until the New Year as they have other, more lucrative uses, for their land over that period. The dairy industry is having an impact on this, as it continues to grow in to areas I never thought we'd see black and whites! This is confirmed by surveys showing that 3- 5% of lamb finishing country is disappearing annually as it's taken up with alternate farming options. True breeding units have remained steady.

We must produce a works lamb or good forward store at weaning. Some will say this doesn't suit the freezing





companies as they don't want all lambs to come on stream at once as they can't cope with the volume, but it's easier to sit on a lamb that's up to weight than bring a lighter weaned lamb up to weight in tight seasons. This showed in our ram hoggets this year as they were essentially turned out at weaning and set stocked through the drought, without crop or other supplement and would now have to be some of the best, most even line of hoggets we've seen. A portion were sent grazing only to return lighter than those that stayed at home as conditions also became very dry where they were grazing. One area they were dealt a blow was in wool weights, down approximately 0.5kg on average.

Our ewe hoggets still went to the ram and once again we were very happy with how they scanned at 90%. After a very kind winter they look amazing.

Our new partnerships are now over 12 months into operation, having experienced a testing first year season-wise.

Pakaraka was also very dry and the team there have done an amazing job in keeping production levels high. It's really great to see this flock farmed to their potential. I'll let Tozzie tell you a bit more about this later.

Our terminal flock at Davey and Wendy Moore's has also been tested. I am rapt with the feedback we're getting on our sires and the progeny they are producing. The constitution of the suff-tex is a real strength of the breed – this has been highlighted in the past season. Around 80% of our ram hoggets

were leased out for hogget mating and returned looking good having held their condition and proven their ability to get the job done.

One area that can often be overlooked in the selection of a terminal sire is lamb survival at birth. This is secured through the breeding objectives of the stud. By using the same maternal culling criteria we employ for our Romney flock in our terminal flock, we are able to ensure we produce sires with proven maternal instinct, backed up by full SIL data.

Having almost 500 ewes go to the ram this year is allowing us some real grunt in our culling criteria.

We continue to keep developing ICA as we can, a slow process as many of you understand. The drought slowed us up this year. I am fortunate to have such a brilliant team, led by Greg McKay, keeping this process moving.

The passing of Di Le Grove was a sad time at ICA. As most of you will be aware my father John and Di founded Motu-nui back in 1982 through a lot of hard work and hard financial times. Di was a tireless worker and was hugely passionate about the stud. Di has left behind a legacy that won't be forgotten. Those of you who have been with us for some time will remember Di's enthusiasm and attention to detail, not to mention the smoko's. She will be sadly missed.

I am still working my way around as many clients as I can, so if I haven't caught up with you yet - I look forward to doing so. Once again, our gate is always open, so come and have a look around some time.

Jason.



Jason and Hamish Cavanagh checking out the ewes in Ranfury, July 2013.



Hamish's ewes showing their Motu-nui constitution in trying conditions, Ranfury, July 2013



News on the Crossbred Front

Our first 12 months on Pakaraka has brought it all. Starting fresh on any new property is always a challenge. Throw in a cracker of a drought and it has made for a very testing time. An extremely kind autumn/winter has certainly been our saviour. We have been impressed with the way the stock have shifted to the new property and have handled the drought. 174% scanning in the studs is true testament to the ewes. Ram hoggets have come through well after living on shade and water for the summer.

For those of you who don't know, Kate and I have gone into partnership with David and Valmai Holmes. Pakaraka has been in the Holmes family for over 40 years and is situated 5 minutes east of Masterton. The farm is 480ha and has a very good balance of country and has been very well planted and subdivided over the years. The district is renowned for been summer dry/winter wet.

Jason and I have decided to try a new breed this season. We have used a Border Leicester as a single sire this year, over our Romney ewes. The progeny will be a 1st cross Coopworth. We have received a lot of positive feedback about this breed and I'm looking forward to seeing the progeny on the ground this spring. This breed will replace the Romdale that we have bred in the past.

Over the year I have thoroughly enjoyed getting out and talking to other farmers. As far as first years in

farming go, it's been a bit of a tough one. Talking with folk in the same boat gave us great heart and encouraged us in trying times. It has been a steep learning curve and we enjoyed some wins, making decisions early around feeding ewes pre-tupping, and we missed the boat on a few things too. Attending a raft of professional development days and discussion groups has provided much inspiration and enjoyment. It is especially rewarding when we get to see Motu-nui clients doing so well and Motu-nui stock delivering real results, such as at Mark and Richard Crystall's Kawatau farming operation over the Taihape **Farming for Profit day** in late July. This was a day I particularly enjoyed. Renowned boxing and youth advocate Billy Graham was speaking. His light-hearted approach was entertaining sure, but behind that all was a great message – we need to persevere and believe that we can achieve our goals.

That's about all from the Pakaraka team. We wish everyone a kind lambing. I think every lamb will be a bonus this year! We look forward to catching up with you all at ram selling time.

Best regards from the Pakaraka team, Michael & Kate Tosswill, David & Valmai Holmes.



Pakaraka ewes coming in well for scanning after a tough season, result 174%, June 2013.



Pakaraka sizzling in January dry, even the thistles look parched.





Motu-nui Hiwi

Scanning has just finished for another season and with lambing fast approaching, it's time to reflect on a very interesting season. Last spring was cool and dull, bringing a reasonable period of minimal growth early on. Come late November/early December we finally got the sunshine and had amazing growth especially in clover here in Taihape. It was probably the best in recent history for us. It was looking to be a great season. Stock was doing well, especially the young stock who flourished on all the clover.

But by mid January we got wind, scorching hot days and minimal rain, the rest of the season made history for all the wrong reasons. No grass and no water for the first time in a long while. It's been said that our summer was the driest in 70 years. Many people around the district were checking dams daily and removing stuck stock, cutting down willows to feed stock, opening gates so the remaining stock had access to some water. Destocking began in great numbers and those who didn't destock began buying in supplementary feed by the unit-load.

By January the stock market was stuffed, so I decided to try and finish all my lambs.

I put all my works lambs on kale crops which proved to be a saviour, finishing all but 573 terminal lambs from my hoggets. All capital stock was kept on grass and I regularly ran off a tail and sold those animals not keeping up. This practice became my destocking policy. This year has certainly been a great year to test my breeding stock, and their performance. The ewes in particular basically survived on thistles and rushes, with some trees stripped of their bark to boot.

Here are our figures for this season:

573 BF Hgt Lbs sold store 3rd Jan, 27kgs \$54.52. Hgt lambing started 20/10/12.

2424 MSL killed, avg 16.6kg, avg \$73.24

RAINFALL FOR THE YEAR

January 42mm, February 35mm, March 8mm, April 43.5mm. May was our first significant rainfall with 88 mm. It was a bit late so we had no growth to flush ewes for tugging. June saw 89mm of rain and warm temperatures, allowing some much-needed growth. We are very grateful this warm, settled weather has remained to help set us up with a little surplus grass. It is however a concern that as of 17 August we have only had 398mm of rain which is about half of our annual rainfall. So, who knows when Mother Nature will dish out the balance?

With this very odd season here are our ewe weights at tugging and scanning results for 2013, which under the circumstances are pleasing:

Stud EH 42kg 22 May, scanned 137%

Commercial EH 43.6 kg 22 May, scanned 125%

Commercial 2th 61 kg 3 May, scanned 163%

Commercial MA 60kg scanned 160%

Ewes to terminal sires 146%

Stud 2th 155% 58kg

Stud ma 161%

All things considered, we were down 16% on 2012 scanning – given the season things could have been worse. I was a little disappointed with stud results. My policy for retaining 2ths has been that they need to rear a lamb as a hogget to remain in the stud. Some of these were very light on condition at weaning and with the season I was unable bring up their condition. My stud sheep are treated the hardest of all my sheep, it ensures that we are only selecting ewe replacements and rams for sale out of ewes that continue to perform under challenging conditions.

So enough from us, I wish you all the best for the coming season. I hope we do not have a repeat of last year and I look forward to seeing you all again very soon at ram selling.

Inspections are always welcome.

**From us here at Motu-nui Hiwi,
Donald & Sandra Fannin.**



Tribute to Di

Dianne Le Grove (Di) finally lost her battle with cancer on the 1st of July 2013, surrounded by her loving family.

Dianne is survived by her husband John, and their five children, Jeff, Shane, and Janine Ravenwood and Jenny and Jason Le Grove, and many loving grandchildren.

Dianne enjoyed many things in life but farming was her main passion.

The dream of having their own farm was achieved in 1982 when John and Di moved to Homewood on the East Coast, south of Riversdale. It was here that they started Motu-nui Romneys, a journey that has seen many friends made and lifelong relationships made.

Dianne's involvement in the stud was huge. Working alongside John, they achieved their lifetime goal of starting a Romney ram breeding unit.

Dianne worked tirelessly in achieving their dream; dagging lambs, drenching sheep, fencing, scrub-cutting, helping in the woolshed at shearing and cooking for numerous contractors and clients.

Her love of gardening was inherent and her garden at Motu-nui was well known, having been developed from a deep gully and surrounding paddocks. In later years, as her and John moved from farm to farm her passion of developing gardens would follow behind her.

Her love of animals was something that gave her much joy. Her dedication to rearing goats in their hey-day and calves were both well known.

Her lifelong love of horses was a passion she had until the end, from Pony Clubs in her earlier days to playing polorosse in her in later life

Dianne's grandchildren were very special and she was always interested in their achievements at school and college, and always followed their progress at their chosen sporting activities. Her cooking of special meals for the grandchildren was always a treat when they visited.

Dianne's involvement in Motu-nui Romneys will sadly be missed, but her memories will carry on for many years.



Di and one of her beloved polo ponies.



MR_CLIENT PROFILES

Andrew & Vicki Ellingham **ROMNEY CLIENTS**

“Waikopiro” Ormondville

We are farming 1100ha east of Dannevirke and moved to Motu-nui Romneys 5 years ago to put over our 5000 Romney Composite based flock. We are finding our survivability is much better and our stock are getting much hardier, better constitution and a more even line of replacements coming into the flock than we were with composites. Motu-nui sheep can handle the tougher periods (the drought 12/13 summer) a lot better and still tup well. We also use Suff/Tex terminal rams from Motu-nui with consistently easy care lambing on top of high growth rates which results in a high percentage of lambs killed off mum at weaning.



Tararua Farmers of the Year 2013, Andrew and Vicki Ellingham with their four boys.

Tom Brown & Nicky Jones **CROSSBRED CLIENTS**

“Te Mai-iti” Tinui Valley, Wairarapa



Starting out on a coastal, hill country property in the Wairarapa five years ago with a mixed ewe flock and no ewe lambs or 2-tooths ,Nicky and I needed sheep that could survive through the

winters and then wean good lambs pre-Christmas, off browntop-dominant pastures, and to date the Motu-nui Romney/texels are doing just that for us. In 2012 the 2-tooths scanned 170% versus the mixed age ewes 164% so that was a good indication that we are heading in the right direction and that they aren't lacking on the fertility front.

With EID tagging all lambs over the last two years we have been able to track the growth rate of lambs. The last 2 years we've weaned in early December at an average of 29kg, twins/2tooths all included. I wanted to breed lambs that I would be happy to finish myself and that would be saleable at any time if the weather didn't allow us to do so. The Texel component of the sheep allows us to stack weight on over a short timeframe which helps in getting lambs killed and in getting ewe lambs up to weight for mating, or ewes flushed.

I also like the sheep to deal with; they forage well and have docked between 127% and 141% in our time here. They look after their lambs well, yet at other times of the year still move easily with only a heading dog.



The Southern Muster: News from Motu-nui South

Isn't it great to see the outlook for farming so much more positive than it has been for the last twelve months.

On the back of an extremely mild winter, the start of spring looks very promising.

On a bright note it is always positive to see our clients doing well and reflecting what is possible and can be achieved with good management and genetics.

Murray and Marcia Kennedy manage Jedburgh Station, a 1850 hectare property running 11000 ewes, 3250 hoggets and 300 breeding cows in the Venlaw Valley east of Wyndham.

They have just completed the Rabo Bank Farm Managers programme and won the top prize with Murray's project based on efficiency and productivity gains. They have made tremendous gains in the ten years they have been at Jedburgh and a significant part of that has been the annual purchase of 14-15 Motu-nui South Romney rams over the last 8 years. He They consistently kill lambs at 18kgs with a yield of 55%.

Congratulations Murray and Marcia on a job well done!

On meat matters I urge our clients to support the M.I.E. meat merger initiative.

It is our one opportunity to get a level playing field for the whole industry and if we don't all give it our full backing it will just be back to the same old unsustainable prices and performances of previous years.

We have a sound and enthusiastic group of people driving this initiative and all they are asking for is total support. Change won't happen overnight but I believe they are taking the right approach and they are keeping their feet on the pedal so let's hope for a positive outcome. We wish them well.

On the home front there seem to be changes everywhere.

We have purchased another 140 hectares of steep unimproved country which will give us 750 hectares

all up. This will give us a good base to expand our operation with a good range of country to test our genetics on. We will lamb 5500 ewes this year with 1600 of those being recorded.

Our daughter Casey is coming home to join the family business and become stock manager at Dunraigen. Hopefully this will give Carolyn and I more time to be on the road visiting clients and looking at their operations, part of the job that we really enjoy.

Despite the terrible autumn our sheep continue to astound us with our best scanning ever so let's hope the weatherman gives us the opportunity to harvest our lambs.

The ram hoggets have come out of the wool extremely well and seem to thrive on being wintered on swedes. They should be another good bunch come sale time.

We will again have a selection of Texel-cross rams as well.

The intention is to sell the rams a week later this year making it the last week in November.

Please remember to fill in and return your ram order forms. It makes life so much easier when it comes to organising your selection days.

We can't let this opportunity pass without noting the sad passing of Di Le Grove, John's wife. She was a lovely lady and a great friend. She and John were a great team and we are sure all our clients would love to express their sympathies to John and his family.

Time to sign off. We wish you all a prosperous lambing and a brighter farming future.

Look forward to seeing you all again at ram time.

The Motu-nui South team, Bruce, Carolyn, Marc, Jolene & Casey.



Murray Kennedy of Jedburgh Station, Venlaw Valley, east of Wyndham.



Consider this ...

"Why do farmers farm, given their economic adversities on top of the many frustrations and difficulties normal to farming? And always the answer is: 'Love they must do it for love' Farmers farm for the love of farming. They love to watch and nurture the growth of plants. They love to live in the presence of animals. They love to work outdoors. They love the weather, maybe even when it is making them miserable. They love to live where they work and to work where they live. If the scale of their farming is small enough, they like to work in the company of their children and with the help of their children. They love the measure of independence that farm life can still provide. I have an idea that a lot of farmers have gone to a lot of trouble merely to be self-employed to live at least a part of their lives without a boss." - Anonymous

Motu-nui Sponsorship and Support

We are often approached for sponsorship from local community organisations. The rural community are an important part of our business and we are proud to be involved with the following:

Langdale Horse Sports	East Coast Rugby Club
Tinui Dog Trails	Whareama School
Tinui School	Gladstone School
Alfredton School	Wainuioru School
Gladstone JAB Rugby	Tinui Horse Sports
Skulls Football Club	Wairarapa A&P Society
2013 Drought Shout Mangatainoka	

CONGRATULATIONS

Ross & Narina Sewell of Omega Station who were the lucky winners at the '2013 Drought Shout' of an \$1150 Motu-nui Romney ram over the 2013 season!



For further information please contact one of our branch managers. or visit our website
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