



**mr** **Motu-nui  
Rams**

Newsletter - October 2023



# A YEAR FOR CHARACTER BUILDING

After clearly outlining our breeding programme last year, we are excited to see our flock structure, hardiness and animal condition improve, especially after what has been a challenging year climatically. With reproductive performance and lamb growth continuing to improve, we can't wait to see what lies ahead – Ben and Vibeke Morrison

## CONTROLLING THE CONTROLLABLES

Like majority of the East Cost of New Zealand, we were hit hard during cyclone Gabrielle, with Kai Tak and the Mara receiving a fair bit of damage that will take some time to fix. It is fair to say that since Spring last year, the weather has been one of the biggest challenges we've had to work through, with the rain seemingly not stopping. As we all know, a wet summer makes conditions prime for fly, worms, scald, facial eczema, and all sorts of other nasties. While this presented its own challenges, it's provided us with an opportunity to see what animals can handle the pressure which we took advantage of. Majority of the flock not only tolerated the pressure, but thrived which was great to see. Ewes that drop below our standard of performance or don't look the part are removed, helping us build on the solid structure, hardiness, and resilience that Motu-nui rams are renowned for.

It is fair to say that the ewes have finished their transition from ICA to Kai-Tak now, with the flock now calling Weber home for nearly 2-years. The flocks handled the transition well and are now being selected to suit the land out Weber. We're excited to have completed a year's selection in the new location and are looking forward to what further years of selection can bring. This year highlighted again how many variables are outside of our control, such as climate. While we can't control these sorts of variables no matter how we may try, it reminds us to strip our system back to basics, focusing on growing feed, efficient grazing and selecting the animals that perform the best and selecting from them.



## CLIENT PROFILE

Rob Craw & Amelia Hodder Ohana (377ha, 2500 LSU) & Aria (519ha, 4500 LSU)

“We started using Motu-Nui Romney rams on our Coromandel farm around 9 years ago after going for a look around at different breeders to see who had similar conditions to what we face. We were after rams that were not too big and were able to produce progeny that can perform in the challenging conditions that are becoming more common. We found Motu-nui also experienced challenging conditions but managed to have high performing sheep, with rams that met our criteria. We found the Motu-nui rams were able to hold condition on our predominately kikuyu pasture in our coastal environment, allowing them to perform well. The progeny from the Motu-nui rams are improving year on year, with the lambs being born healthy and having great type, constitution and a bit of size to them, helping with survival during undesirable weather over lambing. We are continually impressed with the growth rate of the lambs, noticing a big improvement in yields. We finish all progeny on our support block, with the stock manager

commenting on how they don't have to be a big sheep to yield well.

When Motu-nui introduced their FE Romneys, we jumped on the opportunity, introducing them into our support block in the King Country, with lamb survival and performance also increasing. Since using Motu-nui rams, the maternal ability of our ewes has increased, with our lamb survival rates increasing. We have found both the ewes and rams move around the hills well with good feet, the constitution of our ewes is ever improving, and we are starting to see a more consistent line of sheep coming through in our young stock. Our stock can now hold condition better and bounce back extremely well if challenged, which is something we hold very important.

We are looking forward to seeing what the future brings for our ewes as we are very pleased with the changes so far.”

## SELECTION CRITERIA AND GENOMICS – LETTING OUR DATA LEAD THE WAY

At Motu-nui rams, we don't tolerate poor stock, and take a cutthroat approach to animals that perform less than desired. Starting with the visual side of the animals, we are placing a strong focus on those with a solid structure along with solid feet. Those that don't make the cut are gone; plain and simple. We don't drench our ewes and have a minimalist approach to lamb drenching, allowing those with a high level of resilience to shine through, especially during seasons which are conducive for worms and FE such as the one we've just had.

We've continued to use DNA testing rather than tagging at birth and have recently decided to use the HD50K™ programme offered by Zoetis. While it is well and good us saying that our animals perform well, numbers talk, with the genetics programme allowing us to back up our statements

with data. Our genetics programme allows us to track and trace key performance indicators such as maternal worth, reproduction, survival & growth. The HD50K will allow us to see if an animals traits are derived throw more of less to the dam or sire, allowing for more accurate recording of each trait which in turn allows for our clients to pick rams which more accurately suit their needs. The rigorous visual and genetic selection process undertaken by the team at Motu-nui rams not only benefits us, but you as our clients, as we pass the gains on to you through our rams. We're confident we have rams that'll suit your enterprise and help you achieve your own production goals.



Motu-nui stud ewe with 35kg plus twins at weaning



## CLIENT PROFILE

William Forbes. Turnberry Station (750ha, 7000 LSU)

“We've used Motu-nui rams for the last 12 years, starting with the Motu-nui Romney, before changing to the Motu-nui crossbred. After dealing with alot of facial ezcema five seasons ago, we decided to invest in the Motu-nui FE crossbred ram. Since using the Motu-nui FE rams we haven't anywhere near the livestock losses we faced that year, with FE still being prevalent.

Before using Motu-nui rams, we were struggling to scan above 160%, but have scanned at 193% and 205% for the last two years respectively. Using high fertility rams such as the Motu-nui FE crossbred has been pivotal in helping us reach this higher scanning percentage.

Once the lambs are on the deck, the strong maternal ability of the Motu-nui sheep is highlighted, with ewes often standing over their lambs as we drive past. This strong maternal ability has helped with our lamb survival rates on Turnberry station, especially during some of the more wild weather we often experience over lambing.

We are very happy with the constitution, structure and hardiness of both the Motu-nui rams and their progeny, which I know the team at Motu-nui rams pride themselves on.

The team at Motu-nui are very helpful, are transparent about their systems, breeding objectives and are always looking to improve their sheep. The performance of their sheep along with their values above has made it an easy decision to have been a client of Motu-nui's since 2011”.

## MOTU-NUI DATA

One thing we pride ourselves on at Motu-nui is our strong lamb weaning weights. In our 2022 season, Motu-nui 2th's weaned at 136% and MA weaned at 163% . Heavier weaning weights mean more lambs can be weaned straight on to the truck, both capitalizing on the early season lamb prices and freeing up more feed for other stock classes.

Average weaning weights of the 2022 lamb flock.

MOTU-NUI CROSSBRED STUD EWES		
2th	Ram lambs	34kg
2th	Ewe lambs	29kg
MA	Ram lambs	36kg
MA	Ewe lambs	33kg

MOTU-NUI ROMNEY STUD EWES		
2th	Ram lambs	32kg
2th	Ewe lambs	29kg
MA	Ram lambs	34kg
MA	Ewe lambs	31kg



**TEAM MOTU-NUI** Our team of Ben Morrison, Vebz Morrison, Jason Le Grove, Raphael Tobin, Keiran Tobin & Nadesha Dick has grown with Keiran and Nadesha welcoming their first child in late last year.

## GROVERS SECTION

A year not to be forgotten for some time. 2023 will be remembered in many parts as this generations 1977-78. It has been a real slog for many with infrastructure taking a big hit due to cyclones, rain, rain and even more rain. Have a chat to an older farmer that has been through this storm before they will tell you it's tough but with good planning and along with good communication and management there will be light at the end of the tunnel.

They do say where there's mud there's money, if this is the case, we in for a good one. I've been getting around and seeing several clients, with most remaining very positive. Yes, it's been very wet but stock are in good order, and with good scanning results, we should see solid lamb numbers at docking, with the good spring weather so far helping keep lamb survival high. It is seasons like this that the hard work we at Motu-nui rams have done to test our stock under pressure pays dividends for our clients. The bounce back effect our stock has after very trying times always amazes me.

Global meat consumption is increasing annually, and the ever-increasing noise that synthetic meat isn't that good for you,

whilst leaving a bigger carbon footprint than the real deal, is a positive for us red meat producers. Red meat is not going anywhere in a hurry.

Our move to full DNA has been a real game changer. It would have been hard to home 20 different single mating mobs given the amount of fencing that needed to be repaired. Also, it's a real bonus not to be tagging lambs for the first time in nearly 30 years, as it would have been a real challenge just getting around.

I plan on spending the next few weeks out and about catching up with as many of our clients as possible now that things are drying out a bit and lambing is in full swing. It's always great to see what everyone is up to and get the feel from everyone that we are on the right track with our breeding programme here at Motu-nui, producing rams that not only survive, but thrive on our clients farms.

Jason Le Grove



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## FIND US

Obviously we have a change of address for ram sales this year taking place at Kai Tak, 10 minutes north of Pongaroa staying on Route 52 or 30 minutes from Dannevirke on the Weber Road. Will have it well signposted. We look forward to catching up with you come Mid November until then good luck with trying to get the docking done!