



# Motu-nui Romneys

Newsletter  
September 2010

## Motu-nui News

***Another 12 months gone and the newsletters from the past seem to ring the same tune as I find myself starting to write this one, with one exception - we had good rain in January.***

The majority of farmers took advantage of that extra grass in the late summer to lift sheep numbers back to historical levels and put some much-needed weight back on capital stock. With scanning figures up 10-15% on last year and a lot of extra hoggets put to the ram, all bodes well for some much-needed extra income this coming financial year. We will all be looking forward to a good spring, and with the rain we have had of recent months at least moisture should not be an issue! (wind pending).

It was pleasing to see a season where no one was backed into a corner (except meat companies, or were they?) and killing space was not an issue. Store markets were buoyant and finishers have still made a handy return. How much easier farming would be if you were to get a rain like that every year? I dare not imagine what we might have been facing now had that January rain not arrived.

Which makes me think, if the meat companies were buying store stock and signing on finishers to get them to killable weight at the money they were, and still making good yearly profits (as are now coming out in the financial news reports), why do they continue to shaft us when things are not so green? I ask who is working for whom! With the continuation of current trends they will see less product coming forward as farmers seek other opportunities. We are in danger of becoming a niche market as sheep numbers fall.

We need to look at narrowing the margins from farm gate to retail. Do we need to look into more farmer-owned companies selling direct to the consumers? How many of us actually know the full breakdown in costs before the final product ends up in the consumer's fridge?

Likewise the wool industry continues to be placed in the 'too hard' basket for many farmers. I ask myself what we can do to fix this. The two main players are seeking similar markets and they both have similar contracts for growers. I try to meet the required specifications, but to be honest unless we start farming indoors, 99% of hill country farmers are not going to come even close to filling these contracts, the criteria is too tough.

I know that given a basic criteria to work towards, we will take extra

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***"Having used Motu-nui Rams for six years we are very impressed with the fertility and mothering ability with a lift in lambing percentage, ewes mated to lambs killed from 144% to 160% on average."***

**Peter & Carol Bee,  
Southland**



*Peter & Carol Bees hoggets off the shears*





care in growing and preparing our wool if guaranteed a premium at the other end. I am sick of hearing how good the product is and that these overseas markets don't realise we have such a clean green product. Just take a look at the processing industry to see how great their margins have become. We grow it, so let's try to have ownership of it all the way to the floors around the world.

We all need to support a wool company and keep questioning them at every opportunity. We can't afford to let them just carry on. Add an extra \$1-\$2 per kg on your wool income and shearing starts to become a lot less painful, not to mention the extra benefits that come with shearing more regularly.

On the ground floor at Ica we saw something that hasn't been seen since our arrival - grass! After 3 tough drought years the idea of doing away with the cows had often been talked about here at smoko time, and this year we made the move.

Being able to feed our stock in that January/February period set us up very well to achieve growth rates in young stock not seen for a number of years and mating weights 5-7kgs above previous years. It has made culling of young stock a lot harder, as they would be as even as I have ever seen them. It is nice to see their potential come through after all the extensive work we have put in to achieve genetic advances.

We continue our way along the efficiency path with what I feel is working extremely well for us - I had the opportunity this mating to choose our top 400 ewes and select mate with our 5 top efficiency ranked rams. We are getting a lot of traction now as we have a whole generation on the ground, with many daughters lambing, and are now able to track the heritability of this trait. We are noticing a very even sheep developing along with this trait. It is also pleasing to see that over 90% the lambs sent to the works (the majority the bottom end of the recorded flock) have met their grading requirements.

An update also on our Terminal Blackface, I am very pleased on the way they are adapting to our commercial conditions and we are receiving a lot of very good reports on their progeny. We are very impressed with the Texel-X and the hardiness of the cross, something that we felt has been lacking in terminal sire breeds. We sent a line out to a client to be used for hogget mating, which arrived back 10kg lighter after working very hard. Within a month they were back up to weight with no real special attention.

I have not been able to get around as many clients as I had hoped to this year, with the restructuring of our business and taking on more land

next door, we seem to be as busy as ever. I still intend to get around more after lambing.

We plan to start ram selling mid November. We'll be in touch with you all closer to the time. In the meantime, please don't hesitate to give me a call if you have any problems or questions, I'm always happy to have a chat.

**Jason**

*Just as this newsletter goes to print, all of us here at Motu-nui wish to send our thoughts to the courageous farmers down south battling with the sudden snow dump - right when you were in the thick of it! Hang in there guys!!*



# Getting Back to Reality

**Strong global markets, but costs challenging profitability**

***Like many farmers and business people, I find myself entering 2010/2011 with some apprehension as to the state of the present economic environment. We in New Zealand have survived the downturn reasonably well, but I have my doubts about our larger trading partners. While the New Zealand economy is in a more robust position, the year ahead will be difficult and unpredictable.***

The fortunes of the New Zealand sheep industry have become more diverse in 2010. Sheepmeat and related products have enjoyed strong export prices and strong global demand, but excess capacity and a continually high New Zealand dollar have blunted our returns.

Despite the strong dollar, higher interest rates and increased input prices, the New Zealand farmer's confidence has recovered over the past year. The demand for agriculture commodities was putting severe pressure on fertiliser supplies and prices, but this demand has weakened and prices have tracked downwards, which has seen a lift in fertiliser use. Consumer demand for sheepmeat for export is improving slowly. New Zealand lamb defied the global downturn with farmgate prices reaching record levels. Production for sheepmeat fell to its lowest level in twenty years in 2009/10. Production is forecast to increase by 3% in 2010/11. New Zealand wool production remains subdued and prices will likely respond positively as global demand improves. The two major players in the wool industry must bury the hatchet and work together for the industry to move ahead. An Emission Trading System (ETS) will create new challenges and opportunities for agriculture. It will be important that the new system be structured right to ensure agriculture will gain the most benefits. Carbon trading will take place in October 2010 bringing a range of opportunities and risks to New Zealand agriculture. Improving the knowledge around carbon trading and being able to respond will be important for agriculture.

These are just a few of the issues that we as farmers have to face in the coming 12 months. Let's hope for a season to help us forget about the last three. It's extremely frustrating not being able to get everything the way we want it. Last year we had good lambing weather and a great grass-growing summer but a dry autumn, which led us into low grass covers at the start of winter. A lot of ewes in the Wairarapa had not recovered sufficiently from the last three years of drought, and the last two months of cold, wet conditions have put a lot of these sheep under pressure.

Many people ask us, how can we improve the efficiency of our sheep? Gone are the times when we could simply increase our farm size to maintain our farm income. Historically, genetic improvement has focused on increasing productivity per sheep while efficiency received less attention. Effective sheep systems will produce what the market wants, and product quality will become more important to processors.



## **So what do you need from us as ram breeders?**

A sheep system that is efficient and effective. Ewes that are productive over a long life in your flock.

Sheep that require less handling. Ewes that reliably produce two lambs (not three) per pregnancy, have strong mothering ability and give more milk. Not be a large ewe yet have fast growing lambs. Sheep must be healthier, disease-resistant, with reduced dagginess, requiring less management, and produce a fleece with value.

We need to move away from only targeting productivity per ewe and look at ways to measure the traits that will make sheep farming more profitable and efficient.

With spring just around the corner, may I wish you all a good lambing and a great grass-growing season, and may the recent poor seasons be just a fading memory.

**John Le Grove**

# Client Profile

## Daryl & Carmen Stratford

**The Stratford family farm in the Waikawa Valley in southern Southland.**

Farm size:

503 ha. running 2860 ewes including 2 toothes, 740 hoggets and 150 fattening cattle.

This year we scanned 177% in ewes (triplets not included) and 105% in hoggets.

Lambing % from ram out to docking:

2009 144%  
2008 147%  
2007 139%  
2006 139%

We have been using Motu-nui South rams for the past 5 years, buying 5-6 rams annually from the high index mob.

We changed to Motu-nui South rams to produce a smaller, more efficient sheep and to date have reduced ewe weights by 4kgs and hope to bring it down further.

Production levels have increased and we hope to reduce our workload and inputs.

We have found Motu-nui South sheep to be very grunty, deep barrelled and easy moving. They make a great job of rearing their lambs and require low levels of input.

Daryl & Carmen Stratford with 7 year old Regan, and Kelvin, 5.



*“We have been using “Motu-nui Romneys” for 5 years now and are very impressed with lift in stock performance. Scanning is now around 160% for 2ths and 170% for mixed age ewes and still lifting. We are also impressed with how well the ewes bounce back after a tough spell. Lambs grow out well to good weights and grade well. Shearers are always amazed at the good condition of the ewes and how much wool the clip. The wool is consistently in the top price range for it’s micron. I find them to be a gutsy all-round sheep.*

*Ross & Sandra Small,  
Weber*

*“We used to use Androvax to boost our lambing percentage, but since introducing Motu-nui Rams we now can get the same scanning results (170%+) without the Jab!. We also notice that our lambs have more get up and go, which is really helping lamb survival.”*

*Simon & Meg Perry (Waiteko), Wairarapa*



# The Southern Muster

## News from Motu-Nui South

***Things can't get much better in the deep south. We are just coming out of our driest winter in 30 years and it looks as though we might be experiencing an early spring. On top of this we also have the Ranfurly Shield, so don't be afraid to come south and join the winners!!***

However in all seriousness not a lot has changed in the last 12 months. The U.S. dollar continues to make lives miserable for sheep and beef farms and until the American economy starts to come out of its recession, not a lot is going to change for lamb and wool prices. Having been to some of the meat companies' recent meetings it appears that we can expect \$4 to \$5 better for our lambs this season and up to \$10 on mutton. Certainly not the news we were hoping for but at least a move in the right direction.

We have just finished our annual round of client visits and it is very reassuring to see the progress our clients are making. The general consensus seems to be a requirement for deep, well muscled, easy-doing rams with good fertility that produce early finishing progeny and that will bounce back after difficult climatic changes. I can assure you that this is also the requirement of Motu-nui South, and along with the addition of eye-muscle scanning, our focus will not change a lot in the near future.

Due to enquiries from some of our existing clients we have decided to produce a first cross Motu-nui / Texel ram and will have a good selection of ram lambs for sale or lease in late Feb. These are from specially selected Motu-nui ewes and only twin rams will be kept. If you are interested please send back your form with your ram order as early indications appear there may be a shortage and we would like to satisfy everyone's requirements.

On the Romney front nothing has changed. We have mated 1000 ewes this year and have had a phenomenal scan at 194% with no pre-tup drench or flushing so the ability of our ewes continues to amaze us.

The ram lambs were shorn in the first week of August and came out of the wool extremely well with an average wool weight of 4.4kgs. They were wintered on swedes for 5 weeks and have continued to thrive. If they continue at their present rate they will be an impressive bunch by sale time.



We will be selling the rams in the week of the 22nd November and will again be using both venues. Some of the high index rams will be sold at Marc's this year to spread the workload a bit. We look forward to catching up with you all in November .

***Bruce,Carolynn,  
Marc & Joelene Robertson***



## News from Motu-nui Hiwi

**Another lambing is upon us for some and just around the corner for others. The winter for us has been kind, fortunately, after another testing autumn. The dry autumn made it hard to flush the ewes and hoggets for the ram. But due to steady growth throughout the winter the stock has picked up and is generally looking good now.**

The ram hoggets have come through the winter fairly well considering they have been at the bottom of the priority list for food, which is OK with me. It's a good way to cull the rams with poorer constitution. Minimal drenching and limited feed seems to definitely brings the cream to the top.

I've been around most of those clients that bought 2th rams from me last season and the comments have been positive and the rams are looking good.

Those of you I haven't been to yet, I'll be in touch soon and am hoping to catch up with you around the middle of September.

In February I purchased another 50 recorded ewes from Jason, and we swapped 30 recorded ewes each to see how my ewes do under Jason's conditions. It's still too early to get a good gauge on how they are doing. I purchased another 69 recorded ewes in early August, which brings my recorded ewe numbers up to just over 300 plus 107 recorded hoggets in lamb. It's starting to give me a few lambs to cull from and have a reasonable number to put up for sale.



Donald in the saddle.

Hoping the weather treats everybody kindly for lambing and the rest of the lamb growing season.

I hope to see you all again in the ram selling season. I have enclosed a ram order form, if you could please fill it out and return it to me by mid-October in the envelope provided.

**Donald & Sandra Fannin**

**New Zealand lamb defied the global downturn with farmgate prices reaching record levels.**

**mr Motu-nui Romneys**

For further information please contact one of our branch managers.

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