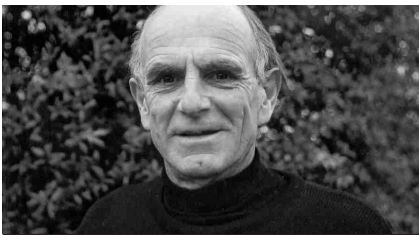


merino inc. newsletter



from the chairman...

Our Merino industry currently faces many challenges: low auction returns for wool, animal welfare issues, and alternative land use. Recent reports commissioned by Merino NZ Inc had identified all these as issues for our industry.

ANIMAL WELFARE

When negative publicity about mulesing hit the headlines in November 2004, a unanimous decision was made by Merino Inc., Meat & Wool NZ (M&WNZ), Federated Farmers and the NZ Merino Company not to add fuel to the debate by making unsolicited media statements on the subject. The chairmen of M&WNZ & Federated Farmers were nominated as the only spokespersons on the subject. I consider that this policy was effective in giving mulesing a reasonably low profile in the press. This was particularly important through the lamb marking period.

Following extensive consultation with the Regional Associations and the wider industry, including picking up messages from the market, the Merino Inc. Board has made two decisions in regard to mulesing in NZ:

1. Surgical mulesing of Merino sheep will cease by 2010. This is the same position that the Australian industry has adopted.
2. Merino Inc. recommends that all NZ growers cease mulesing, in its present form, from July 2005.

We are very aware that an immediate ban on mulesing could result in adverse effects in other areas of animal welfare and wool quality, so we are asking farmers to work their way into managing merinos without the benefits of mulesing.

MEAT & WOOL NZ LTD

I am pleased to report that the relationship developing between the Merino Inc. and M&WNZ Boards is positive and constructive. M&WNZ and Merino Inc. have signed a Memorandum of Understanding – in effect an agreement to work collaboratively in the interests of the merino sector. Following this agreement, Merino Inc. prepared a Business Proposal, which M&WNZ has considered and responded positively on. Merino Inc's intention is to strengthen its relationships with the Regional Associations in order to represent the interests of all merino growers with M&WNZ.

THE WOOL MARKET

[My personal thoughts on this topic]

All wool types have suffered low returns this season. As a result, investment in wool promotion is becoming a topic for debate, with some sectors suggesting that grower levy funds should once again be invested in market development for their products.

Merino growers, through their investment in the NZ Merino Company, are the only sector to have implemented the McKinsey Report recommendation that promotion and marketing of wool be undertaken by commercial interests in the wool industry. Other wool types have no ongoing grower funding for market development.

Growers of other wool types, and some Merino farmers who do not pay a marketing and development fee, are calling for grower investment in marketing. The risk is that we could end up creating a levy system for promotion and marketing. All Merino growers invested in Merino Inc. initially, and then in the NZ Merino Company. These forward-thinking marketing initiatives are now recognised and applauded by

merino ewe hogget: best practice project

Aware that poor growth rates as a ewe hogget can have negative effects for the rest of her life, a group of Marlborough merino farmers and vet, Peter Anderson, set out to determine 'best practice' management that is workable. The aim was for the group to monitor their ewe hogget management from weaning until two-tooth stage, in order to see which management practices were the best to achieve the fastest growing animals and the best quality wool. The data was analysed to show when and

chairman continued . . .

others, including Australian and South African wool producers. Development of the brand and brand partnerships have created market opportunities for our fibre, and producers can now tailor their breeding and management to specifications, reducing risk and price volatility.

The sustainable production studies initiated by Merino Inc. in the Life Cycle Analysis for Merino wool, and the Argos project, will further enhance our ability to demonstrate high quality production systems. I consider that the extra effort required will not yield rewards unless we have business relationships with the market place. Wool sold in an auction system runs the risk of no recognition for sound production practices, while partnerships with the market place do offer opportunities to reward farmers who adopt standards – standards that the market place recognises and, indeed, now demands.

Ross Beech

where hoggets were likely to perform well and when they might not perform so well.

Monitoring on each property included live weights, pasture type, quality and quantity, stocking rate, grazing history on blocks, grazing length etc. Animal health conditions, tests and treatments were also recorded. Fibre profiles at shearing were analyzed. Towards the end of the investigation, when it became clear that hogget performance was very dependent on pre-weaning development, ewe condition and pre-weaning lamb growth rate were also measured on a few properties.

A detailed report of the monitoring and analysis has been produced, and is available to all growers. The group hopes that it will highlight to others the pros and cons of different management practices. Some of these are to be encouraged, while others are difficult, or impossible, to avoid. The group found that, by better understanding the times and the reasons for poor growth rates, management could often be adjusted to avoid the severity of some of the set backs.

The project concluded that management practices that encourage optimum foetal development, and a consistent and satisfactory growth rate from birth through to mating as a 2-Tooth, will not only determine fibre profile and financial return from hogget wool, but also lifetime performance in lambs and wool. No matter how good their genes, ewes that have had their growth affected in early life will never be able to fully express their potential. Early development is critical, and starts with the management of pregnant ewes.

SUMMARY OF 'TAKE HOME' MESSAGES:

- Hogget growth rate and performance starts with ewe management.
- Preferentially manage twin bearing ewes.
- Twin lambs can perform as well as single born lambs.
- Plan for hoggets to graze 'clean' pastures.
- Pasture quality is of more significance than quantity.
- Don't put hoggets onto cold south facing blocks in the winter.
- Consider grazing off property or more specialist weaning and winter pastures or crops.
- Avoid high endophyte pastures.
- Monitor more: weights, trace element levels, faecal egg counts.
- Aim for a minimum weaning weight of 23kg.
- Consider early weaning if ewe condition score is declining.
- Use hogget fibre profiles to gauge past management.
- Plan for excellent ewe nutrition in late pregnancy.

Contacts:

Peter Anderson, The Vet Center (Marlborough), (03) 577 9822; Sally Wadworth, Secretary, Marlborough Merino Association, (03) 572 8245. The full report can be obtained at www.merinoinc.co.nz or from Merino Inc.

FUNDED BY MERINO INC & MEAT & WOOL NZ
(FITT FUNDING)

fleece weighing

Fleece weighing has traditionally been the bane of owner and rousy alike. Most current systems involve a separate weigh scales, where the fleece is placed on a weigh tray after being picked from the board, then picked up again and thrown onto the wool table. Once a fleece is put down it can seldom be picked up again and thrown successfully, so more time is needed to straighten the fleece on the table to enable proper skirting. In a busy shed time lost results in poorer quality preparation. Bob Girvan, Vantage Point Solutions, undertook to review and report on weighing systems that would enable fleeces to be weighed on the wool table. He set out to find cost-effective systems that:

- Accurately weigh fleeces from .5 to 20kg in 100 gram units
- Attach to existing wool tables
- Can record EID tag Numbers.
- Can combine weight data with other fleece data e.g. micron, classing comments etc.

His conclusions were that weigh scales designed for livestock weight recording can be used, however,

the design and structure of the wool table and the design of load cells have a significant impact on the accuracy. The biggest impact on accuracy is the rigidity of the wool table. A very small amount of flexing is enough to skew the weight and give an unpredictable result, but if the table does not flex then the weight will be transferred directly downward onto the load cell.

Based on the tests carried out, the most accurate solution is a rigid table with straight legs and Iconix weigh pads under each leg connected to an Iconix Weigh scale indicator. Depending on the accuracy required other systems described in the report may also be satisfactory. The least accurate solution is a light-weight metal table with sloping legs and standard load bars. A simple but accurate weigh system could be set up for around \$1,500 + GST.

For details of the tests on wooden and metal tables, with different weigh systems, see the full report on www.merinoinc.co.nz or contact Merino Inc.

cold tolerance research

Supported by Merino Inc, FRST and Mid Micron, Dr Rachel Forrest has continued her work into genetic variation in cold tolerance in merino sheep. The aim has been to validate the results of Rachel's PhD work to see whether or not it is possible to develop a gene-marker test for cold tolerance that would assist farmers in accurately selecting genetics that will benefit lamb survival. Twenty three merino and mid micron

breeders participated in the study, and over 11,000 DNA samples were collected during lambing in Spring 2004. The analysis of these has determined that the gene studied does impact on lamb survival, so the next step is to review all the data and carry out some advanced statistics to determine whether or not is feasible to have a commercially available test that is easy to use and gives real benefits on farm. Given

'classer select' market linked training initiatives for classers



The 'Classer Select' training initiatives for Merino clip preparation will continue in the coming season. 'Classer Select' aims to improve classer skills and knowledge so that customised clip preparation meets current market needs, maximising the value of the New Zealand Merino clip. The market is increasingly complex and demanding, and classers, including owner-classers, need up-to-date information, as well as excellent technical skills.

With funding from Meat and Wool NZ, Merino Inc, and The New Zealand Merino Co, supported by input from classers, the 2005 programme will be a series of regional workshops in early June. Attendance at one of these workshops will fulfill the three-yearly 'refresher' requirements for registered classers.

More information and registration details will be sent out soon. For further information contact Mark Stevenson at NZM on (03) 377 7990 or Claire Mulcock at Merino Inc on (03) 365 9686 or check out www.classerselect.co.nz.

the significant costs to the New Zealand sheep industry of lamb mortality due to cold exposure (estimated to be \$40 million per year [Gudex, 2001]), making gains in lamb survival would be highly beneficial.

As Rachel Forrest is currently on maternity leave, for further information, please contact Dr Jon Hickford at Lincoln University (03) 325 2811 or hickford@lincoln.ac.nz

possible links between footrot and internal parasite resistance

During the Footrot gene-marker project, anecdotal evidence from ram breeders suggested that sheep genetically selected to be less susceptible to footrot appeared also to be either more resistant or more resilient to internal parasites. SFF, Merino Inc and Mid Micron agreed to support some additional work, linked to the footrot gene-marker project, to ascertain whether or not there was sufficient evidence to warrant a more comprehensive project.

The preliminary results have been exciting and there is optimism that

a more comprehensive analysis with many more sheep may reveal sufficient information to allow development of a parasite resistance gene-marker and ranking system.

The full report on this study "Investigation of Possible Links between a Sheep's Ability to Combat Footrot and to Resist Internal Parasites based on the Footrot Gene Marker Test Final Report to the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry - Sustainable Farming Fund" February 2005 Bates and Hickford, Lincoln University is available at www.merinoinc.co.nz.

A new project to follow up the preliminary findings in more detail is now underway. "S³" – Sheep Sustainability Strategy – "Improving farm profitability through sustainable best practice breeding and parasite management initiatives" – is supported by Sustainable Farming Fund, Ravensdown, Merino Inc and Lincoln University. For further information on this project contact John Bates phone 0508 FOOTROT or email jbates@ihug.co.nz.

the footrot gene-marker test

The Footrot Gene-marker Test (FGMT) is a tool that has been developed at Lincoln University for selecting footrot tolerant sheep. It decreases input costs as farmers reduce the use of other strategies for the prevention and control of footrot (vaccination, antibiotics, foot-paring and foot bathing). It also contributes to the protection of New Zealand's "clean-green" image by reducing the level of active chemical ingredients in the environment and by lowering the level of chemical use in food and fibre production.

With the current project (supported by SFF, Merino Inc and Mid Micron) to implement the FGMT now complete for the merino industry, an evaluation of the benefits and potential impacts of the use of the new technology has recently been completed.

From surveys and case studies the report found that thirty percent of merino farmers who use the FGMT results in ram selection report significant reductions in the impacts of footrot already and have reduced their prevention and control costs by 50 percent.

The majority of ram breeders surveyed supported the FGMT programme, with 84 percent rating it as "valuable" or "very valuable". However, ram breeders do not believe that, as yet, their clients value the programme as highly as they do, which is supported by the results of the commercial farm surveys. Ninety percent indicated that they will continue testing stud sires and 82 percent are still working towards better scores. The majority are testing sale rams. Sixty nine percent will continue testing sale rams although many do not know how for how long they will do so.

A number expressed concerns about the end of the project funding and the impacts of higher testing costs on uptake of the technology.

The reductions in chemical use on farms that have experienced the impacts of the programme are very marked. On merino farms, zinc sulphate use has been reduced by 26 percent, formalin use by 68 percent, the numbers of doses of vaccine by 67 percent, and the numbers of doses of antibiotics by 66 percent.

The full report "The Costs of Footrot and the Impact of the Footrot Gene-Marker Test in New Zealand – A Report to the Sustainable Farming Fund" by Glen Greer, March 2005 is available on the Merino Inc web site, or by contacting Merino Inc directly. For further information about the FGMT, contact John Bates on free phone 0508 FOOTROT or email jbates@ihug.co.nz.

young merino study group completes first year

A group of young merino farmers has just finished the first year of a study programme that they set up in early 2004, with funding from Merino Inc. Working with Graeme Ogle, the group's facilitator, they identified a range of topics that they wanted to know more about.

"Farming is just so busy these days that young farmers need a very focused means of gathering new information" says Graeme Ogle. "They have an ongoing requirement for up-to-date knowledge about the science and technologies relevant to such varied issues as genetic selection, irrigation development

or nutrient management. It's really difficult when you don't have much time"

The group meets at different members' properties 3-4 times each year. They discuss matters relevant to the growth of their businesses and identify areas where they need more information and understanding. Guest speakers are brought in so that members can learn directly from specialists in different areas.

Topics covered so far include pasture establishment, sheep reproduction, genetic selection, irrigation technologies, land development,

and nutrient management. The emphasis is on understanding the underlying principles so that these can be applied to all of their different properties.

The group has identified 4 new topics for their workshops over the next 12 months. "They are significant issues for their businesses and we will be lining up knowledgeable and thought provoking speakers" says Graeme.

For more information about the group contact the group chairman Glen Fastier 03 680 6254.

pastureplan pasture growth monitoring programme

Under Meat & Wool New Zealand's national pasture growth monitoring programme, each fortnight, 60 PasturePlan individual farm Profiles are available. The summarised results are published on M&WNZ web site (www.meatandwoolnz.com), or you can become part of an email list to receive information for your region. Email the address below or phone 0800 696 328. To receive . . .

Central & Southern Canterbury results, email: canterbury@meatandwoolnz.com

Otago results, email: otago@meatandwoolnz.com

Southland results, email: southland@meatandwoolnz.com

To receive North Canty, Nelson, and Marlborough results, email: ncnm@meatandwoolnz.com.

merino inc website: www.merinoinc.co.nz

- Access Merino NZ Inc reports
- Find links to other sites
- Check for upcoming industry events

Download recent reports on Fleeceweighing, Footrot Gene-marker Project or Hogget Growth Rate Project.

Check out what the Aussies are doing. Click on links to see:

"Battling the Blowfly"

"Wormboss"

AWI 7th World Merino Conference July 2006

Look at "Classer Select" web site: Professional Development for Classers and Owner Classers. Click on a link from Merino Inc or visit www.classerselect.co.nz.

NEW!! Merino Study Group reports

- Winter feeding
- Coping with drought
- Viable Irrigation
- Combating hieracium



dates

May 6 2005: CANTERBURY MERINO ASSOCIATION FIELD DAY

Theme: Merino Meat.

Venue: Aileen and John Sandrey's;

Taverners Road, Dromore Start time: 1.00 pm. For further info contact David Wilson, Secretary 03 347 8483

May 19 2005: OTAGO MERINO ASSOCIATION FIELD DAY

Theme: Merino Ewe Production.

Venue: Bog Roy Woolshed Speakers: Phil Cranswick NZWTA, Graeme Ogle (Merino Benchmark group), Greg Mirams (Fecpak), Richard Ewing (CMP), Allan Marshall (Lincoln), Lisa Rutherford (Ravensdown).

Topics: Wool Statistics for the Clip of the Year; Merino Benchmark group findings; internal parasite management; fattening hoggets; seeds in carcasses; fertiliser use to enhance production.

For further info contact David Anderson (03) 4389 400, Andrew Sutherland (03) 4389 474 or Richard Subtil (03) 4389 820.

June 2-3 2005: MARLBOROUGH MERINO ASSOCIATION

Toyota 2th Ewe Flock Competition

Contact Harry Fowler: 03 572 2808 or the secretary 03 572 8245.

June 2005: CLASSER SELECT

Professional development Workshops for Classers and Owners-classers

Contact: Mark Stevenson 03 377 7990

August 11 2005: Merino NZ Inc AGM
Christchurch Contact: Allison Brook

merino inc directory

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www.stocksale.co.nz

Don't forget that the Stocks sale web site, run by the Canterbury Merino Association, is available for you to sell your merinos. There's no cost to use the web site. If you've forgotten your user name and password, contact your regional Merino Association, or david@stocksale.co.nz.

