

Sheep for Profit [®]

Newsletter

August 2009



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Congratulations Pakarae/Whangara B5 Partnership (Gisborne)

Well done to the Trustees and Board and to Richard Scholefield and his team on taking out the prestigious Ahuwhenua Trophy for Maori Excellence in Farming.

Congratulations also to all involved at another Sheep for Profit farm Hereheretau Station, (Wairoa) one of the three finalists.

Take care with fertiliser spend

According to Fertiliser Matters July 2009 the 2007/08 season sales for two of the three key nutrients (P & K) were down and sales of N were static and it is likely this trend continued into the 2008/09 season.

While it has been very logical to control farm expenses by reducing fertiliser inputs we need to be careful not to make the same mistakes made after the Rogernomics years.

A study reported in the NZ Grasslands Proceedings 1990 (complete paper in the Ballance-agrinutrients section in the Forum) is a great reminder that we don't want to dig a great big hole over the next couple of years and then really struggle to get out of it later on.

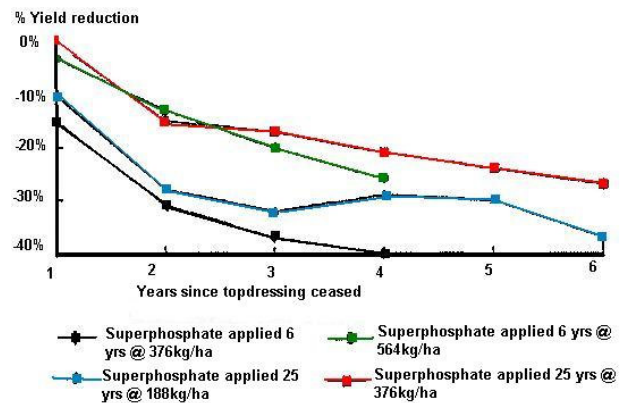


Figure 1. Pasture yield reduction with time, on plots that received no P or S fertiliser (from McBride et al. (1990). Proc. NZ Grassland Assoc)

Irrespective of previous fertiliser application history, significant pasture production (Figure 1) decreases can occur within a year or two after stopping. These results are due to not enough P and S.

After 2-3 years without superphosphate we should expect pasture production to drop by 20-30% depending on previous history.

There are opportunities to target the fertiliser dollar:

- Our Farm Soil Fertility system helps identify what's going on over different areas of the farm. We also have a simple system that estimates the stocking rate for each area. When these are combined we can get a pretty good idea of what each area needs and what it has been getting.
- Use our system to closely monitor your trends over the farm to pick up changes in the key nutrients before pasture production drops too much.
- Improved pastures are much more susceptible to lack of fertiliser than native species. Lack of nutrients in the improved pastures will help to speed up the reversion back to brown top.

What should we do with wet-dry ewes?

Some very interesting results have come out of a large analysis involving 27 flocks and 128,000 lambings in the SIL database.

Compared to ewes that reared a lamb at the previous lambing, wet-dry ewes produced 30-40kg less lamb next season.

This effect was seen in ewes lambing singles, twins and triplets so it must be something to do with the ewe not raising any lambs through to weaning.

The decreased performance was associated with a combination of factors:

- 0.3-0.5 fewer lambs born per ewe lambing
- 60-70% poorer lamb survival
- 0.5kg lower lamb weaning weight

Over the years we have all tended to be comfortable putting wet-dry ewes into the “B” mob to go to a terminal sire. These findings suggest all wet-dry ewes should really be culled.

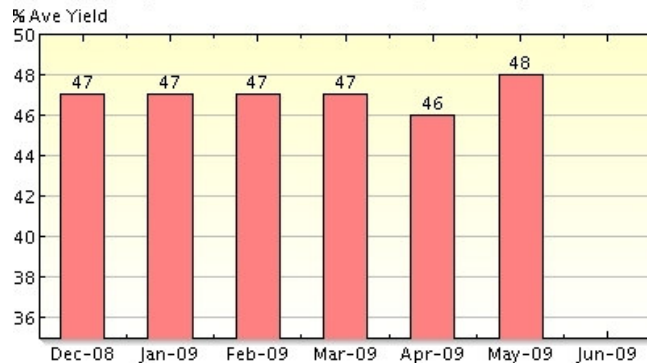
The analysis also showed that ewes with a very high weight of lamb weaned tended to wean 1-3kg less lamb the next season. Their recommendations support the Sheep for Profit strategy of giving low body condition score ewes preferential treatment after weaning to give them a chance to get back up well before mating.

Reference: Amer et al., (2009). Background effects on ewe lambing and weaning performance in well recorded breeding flocks. Proc. NZ Soc. Anim. Prod. 69:115-117

Sale lambs

Gee, it's been great to see so many Sale lamb reports with a high positive profit per lamb this season! Remember though this outcome is only there to give you an idea of how you perform relative to others.

Our Sale Lamb Analysis report continues to highlight big differences between months on a farm and between farms. How do you compare to this?



We know of at least two farms where yield has been up around 46% for a few months after weaning and would like to know if there are any others. We intend to do a bit of drilling down to see if we can find out how this has been achieved.

Urea or Sustain?

Many regions are getting tight for feed which has to mean nitrogen is something to think about. At least this season we should have decent lamb prices to offset the high prices, but there are some properties out there which may not have much choice about using nitrogen to boost feed levels.

This is just a reminder that Sustain is most unlikely to give more bangs for bucks than urea. Sustain has the inhibitor (agrotain) which slows down the breakdown of the urea to ammonia. But this will only make a difference if conditions are right for volatilisation – high application rates (100kgN/ha +) and hot temperatures.

While we may get an early spring, the temperatures over the next few weeks will not be anywhere near high enough to lose much urea, especially if “normal” rates of 20-50kgN/ha are used.

This has been supported by two sets of trials. The first ones commissioned by Ballance-agrinutrients were made public in 2008 – there was a small advantage with Sustain over urea but the difference was not

significant – i.e. the difference was due to chance, not the treatment.

The second lot of trials was presented at the 2008 NZ Grasslands Society conference with the same result – Sustain was no better than urea.

Improving returns in hard times - Poukawa Seminar 2009

We've just got hold of the seminar notes which focused on the "Improving returns in hard times" theme.

We have put the complete set of notes into SHEEP/REPRODUCTIVE PERFORMANCE-EWE FLOCK section in the AgriNetworks Forum.

Here are some of what we think were highlights.

Improving ewe efficiency

There are really only two ways we can improve ewe efficiency – increase feed conversion efficiency or get more out of the ewes we have already got.

Increasing feed conversion efficiency is often talked about but for sheep and cattle (ruminants which eat mostly a fibre diet) it will be very difficult compared to simple stomached animals. They say salmon can convert 1.2kg feed into 1 kg meat!

The best option in the short term is still to look for opportunities to improve per ewe performance.

About 56% of the total feed eaten by a ewe in her lifetime is taken up as a fixed cost for maintenance.

On a relative basis where the dry ewe gives a return of 1 cent/kgDM eaten (from wool only), the ewe rearing one lamb returns 5.8c/kgDM and the ewe rearing two lambs 7.3c/kgDM.

Driving up the number of lambs weaned per ewe mated should always be one of the first options. But there comes a point where continuing to drive up number of lambs may compromise the lamb weaning

weights, which is not desirable especially during seasons where store lamb prices are low.

A model based on 6,000 ewe records and 8,100 lamb records collected from the sheep at Poukawa over 10 years has compared how some different systems can affect net farm income.

Change to net farm income by:

- | | |
|--|---------|
| • Hogget mating | + 14.6% |
| • Delay culling ewes by one year | +6.2% |
| • Reducing ewe live weight by 10% without decreasing performance | +4.9% |
| • Androvax to take scanning from 160% to 180% | +4.3% |
| • Increasing lamb growth rate birth-slaughter by 10% | +3.2% |

It would be great to combine all these effects but the ewe flock is a complex biological system- we know that altering one factor will invariably have an effect on another component.

Hogget lambing

This is more or less a very good reminder of the important factors that help to make hogget lambing successful.

- Make sure they are big enough at mating – minimum should be 40kg.
- Under the same management, hoggets with a bit of East Friesian or Finn in them will perform better than our traditional breeds.
- Got to keep growing during pregnancy and lactation
- Use teasers
- Use plenty of ram power

They have found with their own hoggets (Finn composite and very well managed) that only 60% of the hoggets that were dry were pregnant as two toothed. They imply from that there must be 6% hoggets that are infertile. If this was the case we should expect to see a base-line dry rate in two toothed of about 6%, and we don't see that coming through our data.

However, for those flocks that are mating all their hoggets and giving every one of them the best chance of becoming pregnant, culling the dry ones makes sense – as long as there aren't too many. We know of some flocks where extra hoggets are mated and the final culling is done after scanning.

The rule of thumb has been that mating as hoggets will lift their lifetime performance by 0.7 lambs. However, the jury is still out on this and Poukawa have an interesting trial going now to look at it.

There's a lot more detail in the paper but always the underlying message is that these opportunities will only eventuate when it is done very well and whatever changes are made to one production system don't impact too much on another system.

Which rye-grass?

This information is based on trials done in Hawkes Bay but it does give some idea of differences between perennials and annuals and between species.

- On average newly sown annual ryegrass produced an additional 100kgDM/ha more than newly sown perennials from Autumn until the end of August
- Annual tetraploid ryegrasses are claimed to be of higher quality than diploid perennials but there is little data to back it up. Poukawa has found that lambs grew at 407 g/day on diploid perennial grasses and 364g/day on annual ryegrasses.
- Of the perennial ryegrasses evaluated, the highest persistence generally came from cultivars with standard endophyte

Contracts

We are aware of some horror experiences with contracts for cash crops this year and by all accounts they were good contracts covering all bases on paper BUT in reality the outcomes were well below the grower expectations.

In one case there was a contract manager who was in charge of the logistics and timing of harvesting. It appears he was so busy with everyone else, the

harvesting was slightly delayed. If it wasn't for the grower's persistence to get the crop harvested on time it wouldn't have got done until such time that the delay would have compromised the specifications, which if not met, result in a reduced return.

Payment was also slow despite the contract stating payment would occur on 20th of the month after delivery- this caused a major cash-flow issue and one very disillusioned grower.

This case highlights the pitfalls that can occur even with "good" contracts. Nothing should be taken for granted and never assume that people who say they will "do"- will actually deliver!

Feeding Working Farm Dogs

A recent study in Australia found cattle dogs worked an average of 3 hours, reached speeds of 44km/hr and covered approximately 21km per muster!

There isn't anyone in New Zealand silly enough to find out what happens with New Zealand working dogs (YET!) but your dogs' working conditions necessitate physical fitness, endurance and good health.

- Fit, active working dogs have a huge capacity to accumulate glycogen in their muscles. You can help dogs replenish these reserves by feeding your dogs as soon as possible after the exercise- preferably within 2 hours of finishing their days work.
- The most common diet fed to NZ working dogs is 60/40% combination of meat with Biscuits. If liver is not fed as part of the meat component, the active dog's diet is unbalanced – the dogs may not be getting enough fat soluble vitamins A, D and E and nutrients like copper and calcium. If it's not possible to feed liver as part of the meat diet, your dogs will probably perform better on a complete nutritionally balanced commercially available working dog formulae.