

Sheep for Profit® Newsletter

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Three Sheep for Profit farms in the limelight!

In the past month we have been fortunate enough to participate in three field days on properties that have been involved with Sheep for Profit.

Nearly 200 attended the day at Okawa Farms Ltd near Mt Somers in Mid-Canterbury. The property is an equity partnership involving David & Rosemary Morrow and Tony & Becky Marett. They run a very high performance sheep and beef enterprise. Okawa was the inaugural winner of the NZ Herefords Herd of Excellence Award which was the main reason for the Field Day which had the theme “Farming Above Average”.

Hereheretau Stn, near Wairoa and Pakarae-Whangara B5 Partnership, near Gisborne are two of the three finalists for the Ahuwhenua Trophy which is the BNZ Maori Excellence in Farming Award.

It's great to be involved with such high profile properties and to get feedback on the quality and relevance of the Sheep for Profit reports that were available to the judging panels and at the Field Days.

We look forward to the announcement of the Ahuwhenua trophy winners later in June.

Selling our lambs better – a farmer driven initiative

23 Sheep for Profit farms have recently invested \$5,000 each to establish a company (currently named Farm Quality Group NZ Ltd) that will focus on getting more money for their lambs.

Lambs will be produced year-round under a very high set of quality assurance standards based around four cornerstones that will all be incorporated into our current centralised web based data base.

1. **Meat quality.** Research shows there are on-farm opportunities to develop QA systems around producing lambs of a higher and more consistent quality.
2. **Animal welfare.** Sheep for Profit is probably the only system in the world that actively measures and has standards for animal welfare. Most other systems “talk about” welfare but are unable to back that up with hard data like we can.
3. **Food safety.** Animal health treatments and agricultural chemical use will be included in the data base.
4. **Environmental responsibility.** Farms will have their own farm plans accessible in the data base with evidence the plans are being actioned.

Lamb production will be based on forward contracts with integration between specialised breeding, breeding/finishing and finishing production systems. The core business will be the production of high quality lambs at one end of the supply chain.

The company will be looking to develop partnerships with other key components of the supply chain with the proviso that there will be an opportunity for the farms to build a relationship with the consumers.

There's nothing new with this concept, except it is one of the first where a group of farmers has committed to doing something themselves rather than sit back and wait for it all to happen. The foundation shareholders are fully aware there will be many challenges ahead and a very important one will be the continuation of doing the Sheep for Profit monitoring.

The ultimate goal is to give the consumers confidence that the piece of lamb they purchase has been produced according to a very high set of QA standards. This will mean individual animal identification, public access to farm web pages in our data base including information that demonstrates a commitment to the QA standards.

Farm Quality Group NZ will consider including new shareholders to be part of this exciting initiative. The underlying prerequisites will be a commitment to the principles of contract forward supply, excellent quality assurance standards, demonstrating an excellent standard of animal welfare via Sheep for Profit information and fronting up with \$5,000.

Working smarter, not harder – is it a myth?

We are guilty of using this magical phrase as are many others. This article, slightly abridged and from a PsychoTactics newsletter, gives a neat perspective to something many will be telling us to do during the "great depression".

I just want to ask you one question: Do you think, truly think that Tiger Woods works harder at his golf than anyone else? Or do you think he works less hard?

You may believe that those who have 'made it' require less practice and less work.

Those Internet Marketers who promise you pinacoladas are jerks. Those get-rich smarties are yanking your chain. Those so-called jet-set merchants are working their tails off. Even the crooks, and scammers work like crazy to rip you off.

But they make it sound oh-so-perfect that you think that you'll have less work than ever before. That you'll no doubt struggle to the top of the hill-- and then magically coast down.

Well, I have news for you again. Getting down hills is harder than getting up. And when you get down, you find there's yet another hill. And heck, there's a freakin' mountain range.

So is this meant to make you all depressed? If you're a bit of 'wus', yes it will make you all depressed. Because the fact is that you won't stop working hard. In fact, you'll work harder. But you'll achieve the same task in less time than ever before. That you'll learn efficiencies that you didn't know existed. That your bank balance won't look anaemic for much longer. That if you put aside the dollars, you'll indeed be able to travel on vacation several times a year, and eat, live drink well.

This crap about the easy lifestyle is just that: A whole load of crap.

Look at your driving skills. When you started out, how far would you go in your car? Did you get in a car the first time and drive in the Dakar Rally? Heck no. And now you're probably eating bananas and texting on your shiny iPhone while driving.

That doesn't mean your driving has gotten easier. It still takes all your senses and skill to avoid that jerk who zipped into your lane. It still takes one heck of a lot of skill to make sure you parallel park without chipping off the paint of the other cars.

It's not less work. But yeah, you've gotten a lot better at it. More efficient too. And you don't swear as much as you used to, when you first started driving (well I trust you don't!). And it's because you've put in long hours.

The top performers in the world identify winning factors and practice long hours.

Research on the top figure skaters found that the mark of the top skater is the ability to do their spins and jumps. And that the absolute crème da la crème skaters did more jumps and spins, when practicing. The slightly lower-ranked skaters did just a little less practice. And took more breaks in between their jumps and spins.

The big hoopla about working smarter, not harder is a myth. It's always been a myth. The reality is different. Even the phrase is different.

It should read: Working harder, faster and better.

Because once you get to the pinnacle of your success (if indeed there is such a thing) you'll find 'working harder' is the real truth. So resolve to work harder from this day onwards, confident that the future is just as hard.

Finding the optimum beef cow

For as long as I can remember people have been looking for the “optimum” beef cow. How people view “optimum” is probably the main reason the poor old NZ beef cow has been replaced by other stock classes considered to be more profitable in terms of converting grass to meat and money. The only problem is that the beef cow doesn’t need such high quality pasture all year round where the other stock types do. We all know that.

But just because the beef cow does a great job at tidying up pastures for the sheep and young cattle doesn’t mean we shouldn’t be trying to find ways of improving her efficiency.

There have been at least two beef cow surveys published last year. The findings are almost identical to what we see every year in our Sheep for Profit reports - huge opportunities in most herds to improve the weight of calf weaned per cow mated. If we could persuade you all to weigh your cows we could take that down to kg calf weaned per kg cow mated which is a reasonable estimate of efficiency.

In reality, just like the ewe, the optimum is one that fits the property and your objectives and goals.

A large 5-year study in the US looked at the biological efficiencies (g calf weaned per kgDM cow intake) of various breeds of adult cows fed year-round on different feeding levels. The ranking for the different breeds changed markedly with the level of feed offered (Table 1). We think these efficiencies have been estimated using a model that relies on a couple of cow liveweights and calf weaning weights to calculate how much feed the cows have eaten during the year. Models are very useful tools to help us understand complex issues but they are only as good as the assumptions that are used. The best models are ones that have been verified by properly controlled studies and in this case it is impossible

to measure how much feed individual cows eat while grazing pasture.

Table 1. Efficiency (g calf weaned/kgDM) of different breeds on 2 feeding levels

	Feed intake per cow per year	
	3,500 kgDM	7,000 kgDM
Angus	39	17
Charolais	27	45
Hereford	30	13
Red Poll	47	24
Simmental	26	42

If the model is OK it shows the traditional British breeds are more efficient on lower feed levels than some of the exotic breeds. Is that new?

Our Beef Cow reports do provide a pretty good idea of what’s happening (supported by the findings in the published surveys). Unfortunately not enough of the beef herds are being monitored.

Buying the heaviest bull in the sale will not always provide genetic improvement. Quite a few EBV’s used for the sale bulls may not be related to the key profit drivers of beef production, but the important ones are very useful predictors of the genetic potential of the bull. Your stud breeder is the best person to help you understand what EBV’s are important to your herd.

There is a range of proven on-farm techniques for lifting performance.

Mating 15 m.o. heifers

This is a good option for many farms but must be regarded as a specialist production system. If not done well, dead calves, dead heifers and taking too long to get pregnant again can seriously reduce profitability.

Making sure each heifer reaches the suitable mating weight target and mating 3-4 weeks before the cows are two fundamental success factors.

There is good evidence that the performance of the 1st calving heifer is a strong indication of life time performance so mating a few extra heifers and doing the final culling after weaning is a good option.

Cow body condition

Managing cows based on their body condition is another option we need to consider. We have some pictures in the Forum but as yet have not perceived a great demand to build that into our programme. We need some feedback on your thoughts please.

Calf survival

The average calf survival between pregnancy testing and weaning is only about 85%. In some herds animal health issues like Lepto and BVD may be a problem. In others, calving heifers on steep hills may be a problem.

Bull fertility

Probably the most important profit driver! High serving bulls get more cows in calf early. Calves born in the first cycle will be 18-20kg heavier at weaning than calves born in the second cycle. A proper bull soundness examination which includes an assessment of libido is a great way of assessing the ability of individual bulls to get cows in calf.

There is growing evidence that *Campylobacter* is an important cause of bull infertility in NZ beef herds. A test is now available so if you are seeing too many dry heifers talk to your vets.

The bottom line is whatever the role of the beef cow there are ways to improve her efficiency of production, but only if we are doing the measuring to help identify those opportunities.

Meat Quality- Ram lambs vs wether and ewe lambs

Many will be aware that some meat companies have indicated that carcasses of ram lambs will not be eligible for some lamb contracts after certain dates. The dates vary between companies but correspond to lamb ages from about 5 to 7

months. If such carcasses receive a much lower price per kilogram, this could represent a large loss of potential income for some farmers.

The rationale for such changes has evidently arisen from customer concerns about some aspects of lamb quality (eating qualities- tenderness, flavour, and juiciness), but whether these have been definitely connected with meat from ram lambs does not appear to have been firmly established.

A review of the scientific literature from around the globe where meat quality characteristics and meat flavour of lamb products have been compared in properly controlled experiments has just been published. (Full copy in forum)

The review concluded:

- Flavour and aroma of meat from ram lambs (and cryptorchids) has been compared with that from ewe and wether lambs many times with NO consensus on the nature of any differences.
- Heavy ram lambs (>59kg LWT) reared on a concentrate diet in the USA, produce meat of a more intense flavour which may be less acceptable to some customers. No such evidence for NZ lambs was found.
- Relative to meat from ewe lambs, that from ram lambs is likely to contain less fat and more collagen, and more likely to have an elevated ultimate pH, ALL of which may affect influence meat quality.
- Several but not all studies reported meat from ram lambs is likely to be less tender than that from ewe lambs.

Overall there is no good evidence to support the claim that clear differences in the flavour of meat from ram, wether and ewe lambs exist under NZ lamb production systems.

The reality is – no matter how much science exists, the consumer has the final say!