



East Coast farms pump up volume

Marie Taylor

Eight East Coast Maori incorporations and trusts are part of a newly launched Bernard Matthews Sheep for Profit programme.

Under the umbrella of the Tairāwhiti Land Development Trust (TLDT), the Sheep for Profit project has a target of increasing farm returns by \$12/ewe.

Chris Mulvaney, of AgriNetworks in Te Awamutu, which owns Sheep for Profit, explains the Trust is supporting this new programme.

Sheep for Profit has been around since 2000, and it is a system to help farmers measure what's happening in their businesses and use the information to improve performance.

The East Coast programme is for three years, and while it started on July 1 this year, its official launch was in late October at the Hauiti Marae in Tolaga Bay.

Bernard Matthews NZ commercial manager Hugh Brown of Waipukurau says their sponsorship is part of the work they're doing with the TLDT.

"Our underlying objective is to increase lamb production in the region to help us meet our global marketing requirements."

And it builds on having a plant in Gisborne. As well as providing direct market feedback to the farmers in the project, Hugh says there are opportunities to link in with the Bernard Matthews finishing programmes.

Chris explains that the first Sheep for Profit pilot project, which ran from 2001 until 2003, and involved 47 sheep and beef farms, increased average sheep income by \$12.37/ewe.

"The main driver for the lift in sheep income has been the extra

6.3kg of lamb sold/ewe, and total wool sold increased by 0.7kg/ewe."

Over the 47 properties, average gross farm income increased by \$207 or 49%/ha compared with \$108 or 28% for the farms in the Meat and Wool NZ Economic Survey.

This resulted in a cash surplus increase of \$82 or 49%/ha for the Sheep for Profit farms compared to a \$38 or 21% lift for the national survey farms.

He's expecting to repeat this improvement on the eight farms in the East Coast programme.

The first year of the project involves objectively measuring key aspects of the farm business including stock bodyweights, liveweight gains, condition scores and pregnancy scanning.

"We get the farmers to measure, and they send the data back in. It's more or less a total business audit in the first year. We are trying to find out where they are starting from, and we use that information to compare their performance with other farms and work through opportunities."

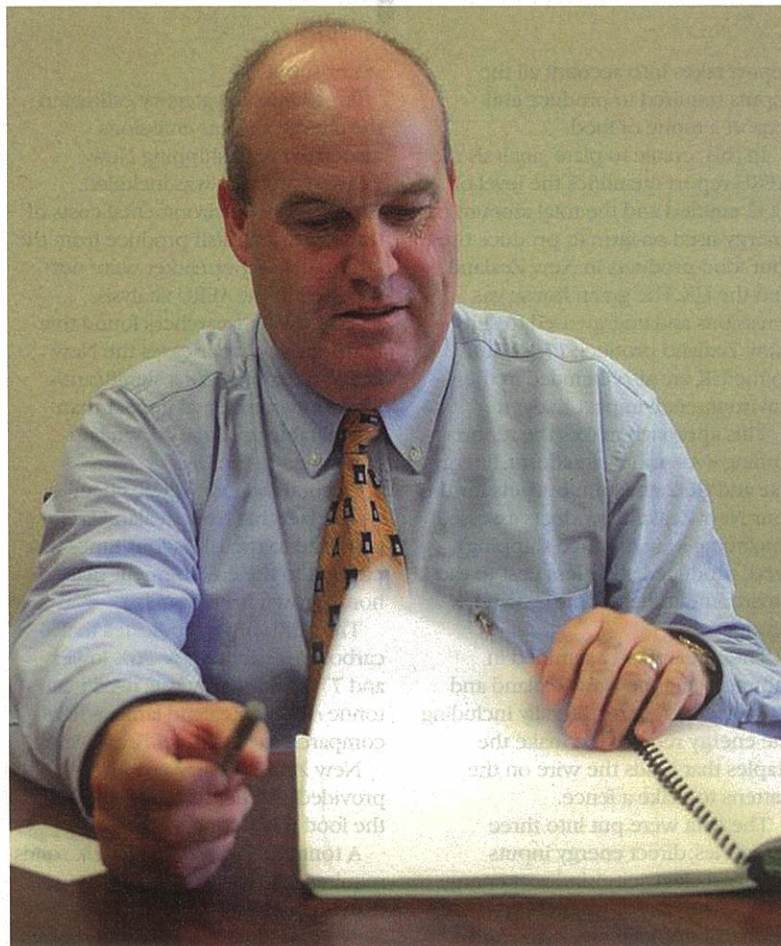
"From there they start setting their own targets and plans to start making it all happen," he says.

The eight farms get on-farm support from two vets, Andrew Cribb of VetEnt in Gisborne, and Don MacColl, from AgriNetworks Te Awamutu, and a colleague of Chris Mulvaney.

The eight are Hereheretau at Wairoa, Pakarae/Whangara B5 Partnership at Whangara, Hauiti at Tolaga Bay, and at Ruatoria Tawai, Kia Ora, Pakihiroa and Matariki Partnership, and at Tikitiki, Kaitoto.

The total land area of these farms is 14,000ha, and they farm 99,000 stock units, including both sheep and cattle.

There's also some financial management reporting, as well as



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soil fertility reporting. Interestingly, pasture growth rates are not measured. Chris explains many farmers are reluctant to measure growth rates on hill country farms, so the main focus is measuring animal production including regular weighing and condition scoring of stock to assess feeding levels.

"We have a system that 95% of the time where everybody in Sheep for Profit would be calling a ewe the same condition score on a

particular day."

Central to the project is the AgriNetworks information management system, which incorporates protocols and recording forms for farm information, and a central database for storing and analysing information to create regular reports.

"Another aspect which is a little bit different from the more traditional consultancy is that we never try to tell a farmer what to do

or what may be wrong. The system is designed so they can work it out for themselves."

"Rather than tell them their sheep may be too thin, they can see it on the reports."

As well as the two on-farm advisors, within Sheep for Profit there are four business partners: Rabobank, Ballance AgriNutrients, Agricom and Merial. "They provide knowledge and expertise to anyone who is in Sheep for Profit with no strings attached. Farmers don't have to be their clients."

"Our aim is to help these farmers produce a lot more product - and cost effectively. Our work is based on the premise that the business of farming is about the efficient conversion of pasture to money. The only thing that can do that is a ruminant, such as sheep, cattle and deer so the farmer's role is to develop appropriate management systems to allow that to happen."

"Each farm business is broken down into a range of systems: animal production, financial, fertiliser and pasture. The systems are broken down further to measure the performance of the drivers of the outcome of each system."

TLDT chief executive Chris Torrie says this is one of a handful of projects with the aim of nurturing relationships between landowners and exporters. He estimates the economic benefits from all the TLDT projects to be worth \$320 million in the next 10 years.

The TLDT was set up in October 2004, and its objective is to transform the local economy by lifting productivity of Maori land and working in conjunction with exporters to boost both farm and export returns.

For more information, check out the website www.tldt.co.nz

Manager applauds Sheep for Profit link

Joining the new Bernard Matthews Sheep for Profit project is brilliant timing for Pakarae says operations manager Danny Angland.

Pakarae is a 2100ha effective property about half an hour north of Gisborne on the coast. It's steep to medium country with some flats, and 14km of coastline. Included in this is 700ha of finishing land.

Pakarae has just been amalgamated with the neighbouring Whangara B5 in a farming partnership, and from July he's been the new operations manager.

Only the Pakarae part of the partnership has joined the Sheep for Profit programme, but adding in B5 may be an option further down the track.

"We haven't got any breeding history on the ewe flock here, and production from this breeding property has been poor historically. We joined the Sheep for Profit project to build up the history of the flock, to identify problems and to put in place a good recording system."

"We now have a structure, and a folder, and the forms to fill in

are pretty simple. It's quite a good format and a good way of building up history."

The monitoring involves a great deal of stock weighing, as well as faecal egg counts. "We have been identifying the results in every lambing paddock to build paddock histories. And we are also identifying bearings before and after lambing."

All the five Pakarae staff are fully involved and included in the programme. Although Danny says the recording creates a bit more work for him, it's a great

opportunity to make progress.

"Lambing has been previously consistent at 100-105% so there is lots of scope for improvement. We started scanning the ewes this year to try and identify where some of the problems may be, and we've Androvaxed 6000 of the ewes. Eczema and genetics are the major constraints we believe are holding us back."

Using more productive genetics is part of the package, and already Danny has bred half Romney half Finn rams over 6000 ewes, and 1500 older ewes are mated to the Suffolk

ram. They also have 520 cows calving. This year we're looking at an improvement in lambing percentages, Danny says.

More subdivision and greater fertiliser applications are already underway.

The Pakarae block has had 395kg/ha of fertiliser applied to it recently, and subdivision work has begun in the past month, with a lot more planned in the current financial year.

Pakarae has about 40 main paddocks, with 21 of them ranging from 45 to 116ha in size.