

Weather no longer an excuse



■ Lindsay and Maria Johnstone from Wanganui have enjoyed the improvements made in their business through Sheep for Profit over the past five years.

A 40% lift in lambing percentage is the result of Wanganui farmers Lindsay and Maria Johnstone's involvement with Sheep for Profit.

The couple highlighted their success to other farmers at two local seminars held in the past month.

They farm 640ha of medium to steep hill country and have lifted their lambing percentage from 90% to 133-136% in the past five years. They have also lifted ewe numbers from 2500 ewes to 3000 in that time.

This achievement has been obtained by continuing with the same Romney genetics used prior.

The lambing date has been put back a month to October 21 to match grass growth and the terminal

sired older ewes lambing date shifted forward three weeks.

They have found the introduction of pregnancy scanning a useful tool especially when setting up forward contracts for lambs and monitoring the financial budgets.

They have learnt to body condition score stock and despite the time required to learn the technique say it has been a worthwhile skill and only taking 1/2 hour longer to do a job.

"At the start I often used weather as an excuse for lambing percentage but soon realised it has very little to do with it."

In the first year the focus was on feeding the ewe hoggets better and with the increase in liveweight came a 0.9kg lift in wool production/head, which also lifted the gross farm income. They are now achieving 50kg two-tooth weights by May 1.

The Johnstones found the overall support gained through the programme to be very helpful. The extra tools such as a formula to determine the financial benefit of using for example a vaccination programme against abortion were bonuses that came with the service.

Maria is also now actively involved in the financial management of their business using simple but effective computer technology.

They found being involved with the programme has removed the negatives from their operation and they have enjoyed the process.

Another local farmer said being involved in Sheep for Profit has given him the confidence to go forward in his business using tools to manage the risk factors.

He has found monitoring body condition score of stock as the most useful information and didn't find it an onerous task.

