MOUNT LINTON GENETICS

PROVEN UNDER PRESSURE!

Follow the Leader...

SPRING 2009

Annual search for sires finds gold

Ceri Lewis

I have recently returned from a week in Australia inspecting the bulls we had identified as possibilities for this year's AI programme.

Fertile cattle with good calving ease, strong 400-day growth and increased carcase attributes is what we are looking for. Positive fats and moderate mature weights are critical factors in re-breeding in adverse conditions, which we seem to be encountering at some stage every year; so these are not negotiable.

Of the four bulls I had on the radar, two were unsuitable upon inspection for various reasons. However I was very impressed with the other two and we are well underway in the process of getting these two bulls semen collected for New Zealand. Both these bulls are from the Rennylea stud of Bryan and Lucinda Corrigan, north of Albury in NSW.

Rennylea have very similar breeding objectives to our own which is a low cost and highly functional cow herd. They have over 900 cows and mate for 35 days only and have done so through three years of drought. The Corrigan's have also made huge progress in breaking the negative genetic correlation between fat and muscle i.e. bulls with positive fats are generally low in retail beef yield. Take a look at the carcass information below of a Rennylea sire we are going to use.

TABLE 1: RENNYLEA B77'S EBVS

RENNYLEA B77	INTERIM ANGUS GROUP BREEDPLAN EBVS 10/09/2009								
	CALVING EASE				GROWTH & MATERNAL				
	CE Dir (%)	CE DTRS (%)	GL (days)	BW (kg)	200-D (kg)	400-D (kg)	600-D (kg)	MC (kg)	Milk (kg)
EBV	+0.9	+1.3	-4.1	+3.9	+37	+85	+108	+77	+17
ACC	64%	52%	80%	93%	88%	81%	79%	71%	57%

	FERTILLITY		CARCASE					
	SS (cm)	DtC (days)	CW (kg)	EMA (sq.cm)	RibF (mm)	RmpF (mm)	RBY (%)	IMF (%)
EBV	+0.8	-4.5	+67	+9.4	+2.2	+1.1	+0.5	+2.8
ACC	78%	45%	69%	57%	64%	65%	57%	54%

Rennylea B77

From the GM

As I write in the third week of September, we have been officially lambing for a week and calving the AI heifers for four days. Other than the odd skiff the weather has been fantastic. We had a record scanning this winter (179% overall) and there are quite a number of ewes about with three lambs following her and even a few fours.

We grew three times the grass in August that we budgeted for and to date it has been one out of the box. Dare I say it, we could do with a shower of rain, although I won't tempt fate as we had more than 200mls over lambing last year? Further north things are getting very dry and already irrigators have been running for some time which is a real concern.

We are continually fine tuning our operation at Mount Linton and last year we reduced our ewe numbers by 20%, increased our cow numbers by 12% and have introduced a cattle trading component to the business. These systems have been designed to reduce our exposure and give us more flexibility when we get unseasonable climatic events as we did in the summer of 2007.

We are now finishing our steers at 16–18 months at 270–290kgs carcass weight rather than taking them through a second winter and selling them store in the spring. Hence our focus on breeding cattle with strong 400-day growth and increased carcass quality, this also means we can focus over the winter on getting our yearling cattle up to 300kgs by the spring.

The only cloud on the horizon at the moment is the exchange rate and what that will do to our returns for lamb and beef this coming season. Unfortunately it is beyond our control and we will again have to focus on controlling what we can.

We look forward to catching up with you later in the spring.

Ceri

Ceri Lewis
Mount Linton General Manager

Suftex, Texel

BREEDING OBJECTIVE:

"To maximise returns to clients through increased meat and growth without compromising survival."

This years sires set to make their mark

Hamish Bielski

As ram selling approaches it is very clear the optimism has returned to sheep farming, the orders are coming in well ahead of last year. We have got some impressive two-tooth rams for sale in both the terminal and maternal flocks.

The three sires in the photos are the top performing rams from last year, used again this year. They all feature well in the top 200, terminal sire ram SIL ACE reports. The SIL ACE reports don't yet (but will soon), include CT scanning data so our rams genetic merit is even better still. It is encouraging to produce a dark faced sire (696/07) with not just good growth rates, but with outstanding meat yields. An exceptional Texel/Poll Dorset sire (485/05) is the result of using a top Glengarry Poll Dorset and he is entered in the Central Progeny Test (CPT) this year.

This makes sure we keep ourselves well benchmarked and transparent to the rest of the industry. The other sire, 78/06, is a grandson of the Glengarry Poll Dorset ram and is the top performing sire for CT scanning in our flock. We have used sons of all these rams this year.

You are all most welcome to come and have a look at our sheep breeding operation, and ask the hard questions. I look forward to seeing you over ram selling and will be in touch over the next month.

SIRE	TERMINAL SIRE INNER VALUE TSMI ($)
78/06	860
485/05	622
696/07	958

Mount Linton 696/2007, is the top black face sire used in the 2009 mating.

The sire on the left is a Texel/Poll Dorset (485/2005), look out for him in this years CPT results. The ram on the right is 78/2006, the top performing sire for meat yield in the flock.

Making more money from the same amount of feed—hogget lambing

According to Dr Paul Muir's research on ewe efficiency, hogget lambing when done right and fed well, weaning 81% can produce an extra 14.6% net farm income(August 2009 Country-Wide Southern). Generating more lambs from stock wintered was the driver of increased returns. He said ewe numbers had to be dropped slightly to accomodate these lambing hoggets, but the gain in net farm income was worth it. While it doesn't suit all farms, environments, and farmers, we see it as essential in our recorded ewe hoggets. This is because if our clients ie. Mt Linton is, then it needs to start from the breeding operation. In turn what it does for us is it identifies the more fertile young sheep, which helps lift two-tooth performance, and finds the earlier maturing animals. This is all aside from the faster genetic gain we can make, which again benefits you all.

A mob of recorded Mount Linton ewe hoggets with their lambs.

Upcoming Events at Mount Linton

MOUNT LINTON DOG TRIAL

28–29 November 2009
Rock Hut, Mount Linton Station,
Ohai

2ND ANNUAL EWE FAIR

March 2010
Mount Linton Station,
Ohai

HORSE SALE

13 December 2009, 2pm
Mount Linton Station
Contact Peter for details (03) 225 4713

Maternal

BREEDING OBJECTIVE:

"Selecting low-input animals that have high performance in both breeding and finishing systems, using the dual-purpose index."

Twins not the only answer to reproduction

Sheep genetics manager Hamish Bielski explains the first in a series of genetic information you need to know about the five key traits driving the Mount Linton Maternal program.

The HIGH FIVE—reproduction, survival, growth rate, meat yield and longevity

Reproduction includes fertility, the ability to get in lamb early, and fecundity or how many lambs the ewe actually conceives. Mount Linton uses a breeding value (bv) called number of lambs born (NLB bv) as its selection criteria for the Maternal line of sheep. This is generated by the large computer database/program SIL and it gives an estimate of what reproductive performance an animal will pass onto its progeny. The breeding value is expressed as a percentage above the average set in the base year, 1995, ie. a value of 0.12 as in the table below means it is likely to be 12% better than the flock in 1995. SIL derives this breeding value from the ewe's individual performance compared to the rest of the ewes in the flock, and all her relatives performance. The more that are measured, the more accurate the breeding value becomes.

A common misconception at ram selection is that selecting only twin animals will increase the fertility in your flock. However SIL and the NLB breeding value is a far better indication. For example, two-tooth scanning results show:

SIRE OF DAM	SCANNING IN THE EWES	NLB BV
Sire A	180%	0.12 (12% better than flock in 1995)
Sire B	172%	0.08
Sire C	129%	-0.43

If when selecting rams you chose to focus only on whether rams were born a twin or not instead of the NLB breeding value, it is possible your genetic progress in reproduction could slow or even decline. This is because a single, born from Sire A is going to be better for reproduction than a twin born out of a ewe by Sire C. A twin from Sire C could set you back 22% in reproductive performance (1/2 genes from sire and dam).

The power in progress is breeding from family lines, not just individual animals and this is the advantage of SIL and its ability to compile large amounts of information into a useful indicator of genetic qualities. However, a twin ram from Sire A is still more desirable than a single from the same family line.

TYPICAL SIL REPORT FORMAT OF RAM INFORMATION USED AT SALE TIME

	No. lambs born	Survival (direct and maternal)	Weaning weight	Liveweight at six months	Ewe liveweight	Dag score	WormFec	Eye muscle area
BREEDING VALUE:	**NLB (%)**	**SUR (%)**	WWT (kg)	LW6 (kg)	EWT (kg)	Dag (%)	FEC (%)	EMA (cm^2)
	0.12	**0.012**	1.95	3.66	2.55	-0.6	-13.1	2.5
AIM FOR:	**Between 5-25%**	**Higher**	Higher	Higher	Lower	Lower	Lower	Higher

Repeat offenders get the cut for survival

Selecting for survival involves two parts; survival direct, a comparison between all the sires used and how well their progeny survive, and survival maternal, which compares family lines of ewes that are the best mothers and keep their lambs alive.

Survival is a trait that is not very heritable so it is harder to get genetic comparisons because of all the environmental factors that influence it. Again the more numbers of recorded animals you have, the greater the accuracy. Mount Linton is focused on maximising survival through culling wet/dries. Culling repeat offending ewes for not rearing the number of lambs they were scanned with ie. rearing only one of two lambs. A mothering score is also very helpful to identifying the ultimate mothers, and culling the worst.

These two factors of survival are combined to generate the survival breeding value (SUR) measured as a percentage.

Angus

BREEDING OBJECTIVE:

"To maximise returns to clients through high fertility, above average Self Replacing Index with increased carcase attributes."

Cattle Auction Success

Achieving the top price for heifers in the South island is a fair indication of how successful the second annual female cattle auction held on the Station in May this year was.

The top pen sold for $1060/head and the second pen for $980/head. Auctioneer Dennis Mullally from Rural Livestock Ltd said it was one of the highest prices paid for heifers this season and was a very strong result for the station. Auctioneer Willie Swale from PGG Wrightson was also very pleased with the result of the sale. Full clearance of the rising-two year heifers and annual draft cows was achieved with prices ranging from $750-$1060/head for the heifers and $800-$960/head for the annual draft cows. The particularly strong result for the heifers was due to Gordan Wallace from Middlemarch entering the beef industry by purchasing capital stock. Thank you to Gordan and all the other clients who purchased cattle and we hope to see you next year.

Auctioneer Willie Swale from PGG Wrightson leads the sale of this pen of heifers while prospective buyers consider wether or not to buy.

Angus beef eats up in consumer markets

Ceri Lewis

Making the semi-final in the 2009 Steak of Origin competition with four of our 17-month heifers was extremely encouraging for us. Only one other beef producer in the country had more than one animal make it that far. To get to the semi final stage animals must meet all the objective selection criteria (tenderness, pH, colour) and then subjective characteristics such as taste and smell are compared.

The heifers had all been ultrasound scanned and as expected there was a strong correlation between these results and their carcass EBV's. This emphasizes what a fantastic tool Breedplan is when making decisions that affect the profitability of our herd.

There are some exciting new technologies emerging in molecular genetics that will further enhance the arsenal of tools we use to make decisions in our breeding program. We look forward to being involved in its development and will let you know as soon as we are able.

There are now at least four programmes that brand prime Angus cattle, including the latest Angus burger at McDonalds. These initiatives add value to the producer and of equal importance, provide the consumer with a great eating experience. It's a win-win situation and as breeders it is our responsibility to ensure that the genetics we are producing for the industry are going to give the consumer a great experience. You will see how committed we are to this by the carcass data on the two new bulls we are using in this year's AI programme, both are in the top 1% of the breed for intra-muscular fat (IMF) and eye muscle area (EMA).

Catalogue out now

All our bull clients should by now have received a catalogue, if you have not please let me know and I will get one to you immediately. I will be in touch over the next six weeks. The yearling bulls are looking better than ever and some of the new sire lines are very exciting.

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