



PROVEN UNDER PRESSURE!

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SPRING 2010

Observations on Lamb Survival

Hamish Bielski

After one of the worst runs of spring storms many of us have experienced, I thought I might just run through some of the vital factors for lamb survival I have observed while farming, tagging and weighing lambs.

1. Feeding is number one. I would also add to say consistent feeding. Aim to have ewes between 3-3.5 condition score (CS) all year round. This seems to give less lambing trouble, ewe deaths, mis-mothering and maybe even less bearings. Proactively take out ewes under 2.5 CS and lift them above 3. This may need to be done a few times a year depending on the season. If the average CS of the ewes is 4 plus then efficiency is poorer over the whole operation, therefore may not be as profitable. This is seldom the case.
2. If fed correctly as above, this should lead to a lamb birth weight ranging between 4.5-5.5kg LW. This is the optimum weight for maximizing lamb survival. Weigh some dead lambs so you know where you are at. It is a very good indication of how you are feeding, and genetics combined. The Finn breed seems to lower lamb birth weights significantly so use carefully in an environment which can be harsh.
3. Lamb onto pasture covers at least 5cm or 1200kg DM/ha. This means the average will be 1300kg DM/ha or more. If you see sheep crap when you look over a paddock the ewes will wander more once they have lambed, increasing the chance of mis-mothered lambs. This is so crucial with two-tooths as they most likely to have poorer mothering ability.
4. If you lamb hoggets, aim to keep those that rear at least one lamb. Those ewes seem to be superior mothers as two-tooths and onwards.
5. If you have heavier soils and farm in a high rainfall environment, I would recommend sowing dense pasture species. Lambs die faster on cold wet soil and ewes are far less settled. Tetraploids don't seem to complement lamb survival unless covers are around 1500kg DM/ha or more. Soil drainage is also fundamental.
6. Udders should be well formed, not too low, with narrow teats pointing slightly forward at a 45 degree angle. This also seems to be somewhat heritable.
7. Last but not least is genetics. The survival component in the genetic makeup of sheep is becoming more reliable with some exceptional rams coming through the industry via SILACE, generated by the Central Progeny Test (CPT) program. As each year goes by, more data is collected and more daughters are lambed by influential sires, increasing the accuracy of survival ebvs. Mothering ability has a major influence on lamb survival and this is expressed through the survival maternal EBV, as opposed to survival direct EBV (sire effect only).

To achieve 140% lambing and higher the combination of factors affecting lamb survival is important and is what Mount Linton aims for. I believe selecting for the genetic component of survival is an area of opportunity for breeders that will increase the profitability of sheep farming.



David Bielski holds a set of Suftex quad lambs. They weighed 3.9, 4.1, 5 and 5kg at birth.

From the GM

After a great winter we have just been through the toughest week I have experienced weather wise in my farming career. But with that behind us, we are looking forward to getting on with the spring programme. A week of North West wind and the tractors will start working the ground for new grass, and as soon as the wind drops the choppers will be spraying out our hill country development blocks. Last year's blocks were a huge success, we started grazing them in early May with calves and the yearlings were still out there at the end of September.

Our autumn female sale was a case of "you should have been there". It was a buyers' market this year due to a drought in Otago having a significant impact on demand, and perhaps the success of the previous year may have kept potential customers away. But we are committed long term to the sale and this year's crop will be on the market again on the 12th May next year.

The social club had a great weekend up the mountain at Cardronna during the winter and after a solid night at the bar our digger driver Tomo gained himself the new record for consuming lots of beers in 27 seconds. Most went skiing, and those of us who wouldn't be seen dead in any of that gear or are terrified of chair lifts, took their hangover's pig hunting. We will have tennis and touch rugby teams in the local competition this summer; we have a great crew at the Station providing a few laughs.

We have a long overdue horse sale coming up on the 17th October and the 2010 bull catalogue is out now so if anyone has not received theirs, please let us know so we can get one to you. We look forward to catching up with our bull and ram clients in the late spring.

Ceri Lewis
Mount Linton General Manager

www.mountlinton.co.nz

General News

Welcome to:

Anna Vaughan

After a year of overseas travel Anna was attracted to the scale of Mount Linton a few months ago when considering her opportunities. A bachelor of Agricultural Science put her in good stead for the job as block manager as did her experience working on Stations at Dunedin and Omarama.



Anna Vaughan ready for a day's work.

Daniel and Sarah Burke

The diversity of sheep and beef farming drew Daniel and Sarah back into the industry three years ago, and their first winter at Mount Linton sees them happy with their choice.

A six year stint at dairy farming was enjoyed as a short-term measure for future farm ownership, but as land and cow prices accelerated up, they opted out and went for a lifestyle choice.

Daniel saw a more varied days work on a sheep and beef farm as the optimum for the future and is enjoying having a team of dogs again.

He spent the past two and a half years in Canterbury at Coleridge where he honed the skills he learnt on sheep and beef farms after leaving school. Daniel is a block manager.



Daniel and Sarah Burke and their three children, Samuel (5), Jack (3.5 years) and Hannah (1.5 years)

Upcoming Events at Mount Linton

DOG TRIAL

WHEN: 27–28 November 2010

WHERE: Rock Hut, Mount Linton Station

4TH ANNUAL FEMALE CATTLE AUCTION

WHAT: IC heifers and annual draft cows

WHEN: 12 May 2011

WHERE: Mount Linton Station, Ohai

HORSE SALE

WHEN: 17 October 2010

WHERE: Mount Linton Station

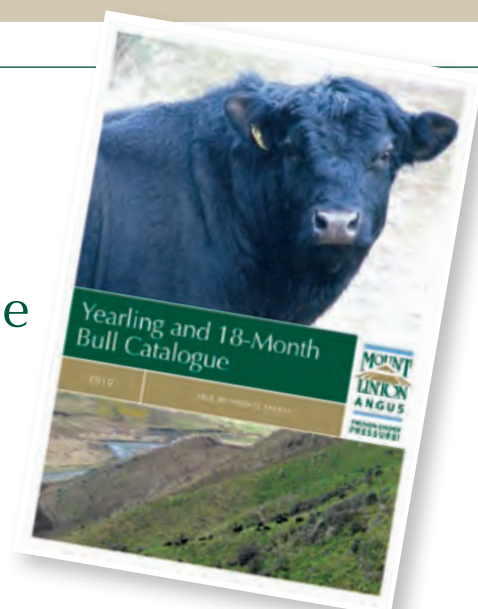
CONTACT: Pete on 021 143 3949

ANNUAL EWE FAIR

WHEN: 4 March 2011

WHERE: Mount Linton Station

Yearling and 18-month bull catalogue out now



Suftex, Texel, Maternal



Mean lamb kill date rockets forward three weeks

David Bielski, farm technician

The 2009-2010 lamb finishing season proved to be a very successful one on the Station. The target of 40,000 lambs was exceeded by 300 and was up 4,800 lambs on the past year. The most significant improvement though was a three week advance in the mean kill date to 20th February.

Predominantly it was boosted by the increased Texel component in the new Maternal coming through in the main line of lambs. Straight off grass the average liveweight at drafting stayed at 40.5kg but the yield/animal lifted from 41.5% to 43.5%. This increased the carcass weight by 1.05kg/animal and was worth an extra \$4.7/head.

Introducing improved rye-grass cultivars ie. high sugar grasses, to express the genetic potential of these lambs was the other main factor in the success of the past season. As a result of these factors, live-weight gain increased on average by 30 grams/animal/day to average 251g/day from birth to slaughter.

Of the 36,550 lambs supplied within Alliance's target weight requirements, 83% met Alliance's requirements for the premium payment for meat yield. This is testament to the breeding program incorporating years of CT scanning information of sire lines on the Sheep Genetics Unit for meat yield. This season Alliance is widening its premium target weight to include heavier lambs, which will mean more of our lambs will hit the meat yield premium.

The prospects of the coming season look exciting. The target for this year is 45,000 lambs finished to 18kg CW at a mean kill date of 1st February.

Genetics determine feed conversion efficiency

Hamish Bielski

Increasing growth is known to naturally increase mature adult size in both sheep and cattle. This trend can be reversed with accurate weighing of all recorded ewes each year at least once to identify the curve benders (high growth, medium mature weight), which are present in every population. If you don't measure, you will struggle to identify these animals. Just be aware I am talking about the genetic potential of the ewe, the feeding and management factors are removed as all ewes are run under the same conditions.

Our target adult weight at mating for ewes on Mount Linton is 65kg. Wintering costs in the South are expensive and we don't want to be maintaining big heavy ewes. At this point we are achieving this, and at the same time our lambs have the ability to kill out at weights of 20kg CW or more, growing and yielding well. For example a killing sheet of lambs weighing 19.6kg CW, achieved 100% of lambs hitting Alliance's target meat yield threshold. The Texel component of our maternal breed has meant we can achieve this.

Since the year 2000, we have genetically increased our autumn growth rates in the Texel by 4kg, but our ewe weight by only 2kg. We don't want to take the fat off our ewes. Having animals that are efficient feed convertors means if we are lambing consistently over 130%, we can put at least 40% of our ewes to the terminal sire (bred for high growth rate and meat yield) without having to worry about ewe weight. Mount Linton is striving for a functional ewe that performs well in our environment and can produce a lamb that finishes quickly within the market requirements for carcass weight and quality.



The Stations ewe hoggets graze crop on the developed hill country over the winter.

Angus



BREEDING OBJECTIVE:

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

High density 50,000 panel an exciting new DNA tool

Ceri Lewis

As Angus breeders we have a new tool available to us to make more informed and precise sire selection decisions with the recent launch of the High Density (HD) 50,000 (50K) panel. This is a DNA test, the results of which gives us powerful information on 13 traits, some existing and some new, and takes a great deal of the guess work out of the uncertainties of using young unproven sires with low accuracies. HD 50K MVP (molecular value predictions) compliment EBV's (estimated breeding values) and help mitigate the risk associated with selection decisions by more accurately evaluating the breeding value of young sires. Prior to this latest DNA marker technology it was only possible to evaluate a sire by gathering performance data from multiple progeny which contributed to the sires EBV's. In the past sires with potential could often be four or five years old by the time we had enough information on him through progeny testing to evaluate how he was breeding, now the HD 50K test will tell us with a high degree of accuracy how that sire is likely to pass on his genetic potential to his offspring. We have several exciting young sires that we will be testing soon with a view to using them in this year's AI programme.

Scanning in the snow

Although we have been scanning our heifers for some years now in March, we carcass scanned our yearling bulls for the first time this year. On the 24th of September in a snow storm, Bill and Judy Austin snow ploughed the road from Winton to the Station and we banded 250 bulls through the snow and mud to get it done. It was very cold and we took smoko and lunch out with us and ate it all at smoko! I felt like Oliver Twist calling the cook shop and asking for more but good old Suzie didn't bat an eyelid, yeah right.

We haven't scanned them in the past because most bulls are scanned at about 15 months when they have a bit more fat cover and we sell a big percentage of our bulls as yearlings. With our increasing focus on carcass data we felt we needed to start doing the bulls so we can identify the cream and use it as another culling tool. Bill was very impressed with how they scanned and we have identified one "outlier" that could be very valuable in our breeding program in the future. Thank you for going the extra yard Bill and Judy it was much appreciated.



The weaner bulls wintered on crop on the development hill country. They averaged 338kg at scanning.

High marbling the way to go

In early August I spent four days in Australia with Rob Williams as I do every year to inspect the sires we want to use in our AI programme. Rob is the encyclopaedia of Angus in Australia and is great company on the long road trips. We have aligned ourselves with the Rennylea stud of Bryan and Lucinda Corrigan at Bowna in New South Wales who have very similar breeding objectives to our own. They have a strong focus on breeding cattle that lower the cost of production to their clients by having an uncompromising approach to fertility, (a thirty five day joining period) the cattle grow quickly, have a moderate maturity pattern, they are well muscled with positive fats, finish quickly and marble well off grass. It is a well researched fact that the eating quality of high IMF cattle is significantly better than those that are not. We ate a sirloin steak in an Albury restaurant from a grass fed Rennylea Steer which had a marble score of 5 that was the best piece of beef I have ever eaten. I am absolutely convinced that if we can breed animals of this quality they will be well sought after and we will be well rewarded.

We used a Rennylea bull C511 in our programme last year, and his calves are being born at the moment. I saw over 300 bulls at the Corrigan's in August of various ages and the C511 sons were outstanding so I am quite excited about this year's drop. I have bought more of C511 and also B77 who I wanted to use last year but it didn't get through the red tape before our programme started. They are half brothers out of a cow W449 who has the most amazing data set. In summary I am very pleased with the way our programme is heading.



Progeny of Rennylea C511 are being born on the Station this spring.



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