



**PROVEN UNDER  
PRESSURE!**

**AUTUMN 2017**

# Follow the Leader...

## Trans - Tasman Beef Cow R & D Programme Ceri Lewis

The New Zealand Beef and Lamb funded project has amalgamated with their Australian counterparts and we met in Albury NSW in November and will again in Palmerston North in May, there is some really exciting stuff happening here, watch this space.

In terms of our own data, we weaned the stud calves at 130 days and they averaged 1.3kgs/day from birth to weaning, the cows that had lost up to 150kgs liveweight over the winter then put most of it back on by mating in mid December then gained only 200gms a day on average over the summer which equated to 18kgs but interestingly

had gained .5 of a condition score and averaged 7.5; given they have been doing the hard yards over the summer cleaning up for land lice. They are extremely efficient animals and I just love them to bits!

Our yearling Bulls did a great job of tailing up the stud cows after the AI programme and we ended up with 3.6% dry rate. They have bounced back well and are in great shape for our autumn sale. We will have our catalogue out in late April and will start selling in mid May. I look forward to catching up with everyone either in the autumn or over the winter.

## Mount Linton Field Day

Our Fieldday at the end of February drew a crowd of 350 people who rotated around the Station in four groups. The focus of the day was on adding value to Lamb and Beef as well as a look at our Beef and Sheep finishing programmes and our Hill Country Development programmes. It was a magnificent day weather wise and we had people from as far away as Northland to hear from our guest speakers.

Tom Bull has a large ram breeding business in Holbrook in New South Wales with 5000 ewes and four breeding programmes and we swap genetics. Tom gave us a fascinating insight into the Australian lamb market, saying it was simply a by-product to wool but is now a specialist industry with more meat sheep and less wool sheep. 50% is exported and 50% domestic. The EQ quota forced market diversification. There are numerous systems that coexist to smooth supply, Merino, 1st cross and self replacing. Skins are an important part of the income averaging \$12 over the past 15 years.

Beef branding is exploding in Australia, there is a branding revolution based on point of difference products (mostly related to marbling but also regional and grass fed). A high quality guaranteed eating experience is a given and the combination of genetics and feeding is King.

Where is lamb in comparison? There is little point of difference between lamb brands, most is procured from the same cross section of breeds from the same cross section of finishing programmes and the industry was going backwards for eating quality traits. Some consumer taste testing was carried out on a cross section of sire progeny tests run in one management group. The Loins were taken out

and taste sampling conducted. The difference was staggering!

The implications of variation means an "all lamb is good" attitude will hurt the industry and it is difficult to grow cult brands given the variation in lamb. It is hard to match expectation with the current system and we are missing global opportunities in the top end of meat retailing.

What is the way forward? Objective measurement vs genetic control. Genetic control is used typically in leading beef brands. Accuracy in breeding is King, carcass data will be more important and Genomics will assist in the process as accuracy % is important.

How good can lamb be? Genetic and nutritional control should be able to deliver 6-7% IMF (marbling), the current national average is 4.2%. The ability to develop a better control will be complex but paramount. There is opportunity for brand development on the back of better quality control but it needs to be done profitably, carcass and production economics are often antagonistic to carcass quality.

Bryan Corrigan from Rennylea Angus spoke about their programme and adding value through selecting the right genetics. The Rennylea herd has an emphasis on Birth weight, 400 day weight, Mature Cow weight, IMF, EMA and rib and rump fat. Donor cows are an important tool in terms of making genetic progress. Post calving as a 2year old the heifers are assessed on EBVs, structure, temperament and most importantly the phenotype. Rennylea are looking for moderate framed young cows with capacity that have conceived early and calved successfully. The herd is in the top 3% of the

## From the GM

It's been a tricky season in the Deep South, we had a magnificent spring and the soil temperature was 18 degrees by the end of October, then it dropped to 12 in November and stayed there until the end of January. We are having an Indian summer now with day time temperatures in the mid 20's to early 30's but no rain!

After three years of clover root weevil we have seen the return of our clover this spring although it has not fully recovered, however it is a huge relief to know we are on the mend. On reflection whilst it has cost us a significant amount of production loss which has impacted the bottom line, it forced our hand into exploring other options to finish our lambs and the end result is we now have 300ha in Red Clover which has completely transformed our lamb finishing systems. This year we added Agritonic plantain to the 100ha mix and that has further enhanced the liveweight gains. I have heard a fair bit of whingeing about the price of lamb this year but if you can take lambs to 19 plus kilos it's not too shabby. Again it's about what we can do behind the farm gate to maximise our returns. We have a saying here, "find a way"!



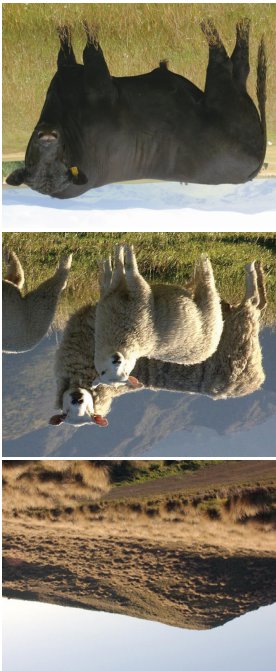
We welcome Emma Gardiner to the team as our new Sheep Genetics Manager, at the time of writing this Emma has been here a week, but has shown she can really roll her sleeves up. We will be on the road this winter to introduce Emma to as many of you as we can.

Emma grew up on a North Canterbury Sheep and Beef farm, following her dad around in the school holidays. After getting her BSc Emma set off to travel the world and worked on farms in Canada and the UK before making it home again.

*Ceri*

**Ceri Lewis**  
Mount Linton General Manager

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*Silver Fern Farms National Agribusiness Manager  
Greg McSkimming, Mount Linton General  
Manager Ceri Lewis and Bryan Corrigan of  
Rennylea Angus at the Mount Linton Field day.  
Photo by the Southland Times.*



Food for thought!

Increases income by \$350 per 100 calves. If you select your heifers by index, based on top 65%, and retain 60 heifers out of 100, the benefit is \$4 per calf versus selecting your heifers on fertility, pregnancies, the benefit is \$28 per calf.

The second issue was around management of data, genomics and value based payments. Digital transformation is exploding. Apps, new software, integrated platforms that deliver tailored solutions from the massive amounts of available data.

In the livestock industry, genetic improvement and genomics is the world of BIG DATA. At this stage the genomic result is being added to the phenotypic EBV driven off the pedigree. The next iteration will be SINGLE STEP. The basis of single step is the relationship matrix, which maps the genotype based on the proportion of genes from the dam and the sire rather than averaging them at 50% from each. When single step is implemented, forecast for the end of 2017, there will be changes in animal rankings, based on their actual relationships and genotype.

The third issue was around on farm advances, cow fertility. High fertility is described by the conception pattern or having a large number of calves born unassisted early in the calving period (first cycle). Profitability is driven by when the cows are pregnant not if they are. Moving from a ten week mating to a six week mating is worth \$4,900 per 100 calves. To drive this home further, moving the average conception day by 1 day

Bryan summarised by saying there is no doubt that correct and consistent selection of EBV's for maternal efficiency and carcass traits will add value to commercial herds and it is imperative that seed stock producers lead the charge down that path; however best practice management must be used to capitalise on these genetics and deliver the results.

At the conclusion, Lucinda Corrigan from Rennylea summarised the day and identified three key issues facing farming in the future. The first was Climate change and our "social licence to operate" The Australian beef industry had reduced overall emissions by 24% since 1981 although 8.2 million tonnes of food was wasted each year in Australia. Lucinda talked about using genetic improvement to reduce emissions by faster growth to market specs, managing fertility, making sure the average conception day is optimal and balancing traits so that the cost of production does not increase.

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