

DEER INDUSTRY NEWS

Issue 10 • July 2004 • Official magazine of Deer Industry New Zealand and the NZDFA

Wound healing properties
of velvet: science gaining
traction - p32



Deer Industry
Conference
Taupo 2004

**SPECIAL
REPORT**



Also in this issue:

- Fighting bovine Tb
- Award winners announced
- Landcare Manual launched
- Stuart Natrass profiled
- Venison training at Te Kauwhata plant
- John's vaccine research update
- Pastures to match unique nutritional requirements of deer



DEER INDUSTRY
NEW ZEALAND

NZDFA
New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association



Industry vision well served by 2004 Conference

Industry conferences generally are remembered for one or two highlight events and the enjoyable background hum of interacting with others from all industry sectors.

This year, delegates were able to enjoy a complete array of stimulation and reflection that embraced the theme "Expanding the Vision...targeting the future". Industry leaders, producers, scientists and our industry partners were left with a strong basis for confidence.

Our guest panel, who presented fresh, future-focused views, commented on the quality of questions following their own input. This recognises delegates' depth of knowledge of deer farming and desire to achieve its potential.

Themes of uncompromising quality, commitment to adding value to product and selling the *Brand NZ* story as part of the marketing mix were common. Among the most challenging were the references to recent on-farm productivity gains in the lamb industry, and questions about the scope for deer to match these gains.

Overcoming those challenges will have to become a cornerstone of profitable farming. As an industry we cannot afford to tolerate unnecessary reproductive wastage, poor growth and missed opportunities to realise the potential that is evident in many productive systems.

As national benchmarking systems develop, the reality is that most young deer are only 70 percent of their potential size at weaning at the end of autumn. That potential can be realised. The genetics are available but need to be readily identified and promoted. Leading farmers and researchers have the knowledge to improve productivity. Successfully meeting market opportunities will require larger calves growing earlier, as well as extending the consumption season.

An outstanding paper from Matt Holden, (highlighted on page 34), incorporates both improved productivity and

sustainable farming principles and a \$350/ha profitability boost by integrating hogget lambing as an aid to developing better quality pastures for lactation. His key message was to weigh the potential health risks against the benefits of a controlled integrated farming system and then reduce all the potential stressors in the system. All these factors are balanced with clearly defined and measured objectives – heavier weaners earlier from top genetics and innovative pasture management driven by an understanding of both pasture and animal growth and quality needs for his market endpoint. Stimulating.


This issue of *Deer Industry News* also delivers to farmers the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Landcare Manual as a further example of the industry's commitment to excellence and vision from over 150 contributors.

Over the past two years it has been hugely rewarding to experience the dedication of a small group of willing volunteers, working with the wisdom of practical and passionate farmers, and to link that so positively with environmental management agencies.

The industry can be proud of the Manual as a commitment to developing sustainable farming as a core instinct in everyday management. Equally, this represents the passion, vision, responsibilities and understanding of deer within your own farming environment and the needs of both.

This month has also seen significant progress with another 3-year project, with the well received draft welfare code, the first industry-developed pastoral code, presented to NAWAC. This major work is again characterised by huge input from individuals, Branches and the partnership with researchers and professionals to develop an internationally acclaimed and sanctioned code of care and responsibility.

With these highlights and the initiatives through DEERresearch, SFF, Branch activities, DINZ's industry good programmes and, most critically, renewed passion and innovation on farm, the emerging industry strength felt in recent months has some extraordinary foundations.

I thank all those who attended the Conference and contributed so constructively and made this event a milestone in the ongoing achievement of the industry vision. 

Tony Pearce, Producer Manager, Deer Industry New Zealand

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Wairakei 2004: Good natured, informative and well run

Despite a sluggish start to bookings, the 2004 Deer Industry Conference at the Wairakei Resort near Taupo eventually attracted around 170 registrations, well in line with recent conferences and comfortably over the break-even threshold.

Deer Industry New Zealand repeated its positive association with conference organiser Dunedin Conference Management Services following the success of last year's Timaru conference, with the Tongariro Branch shouldering responsibility as local hosts.

In line with the current state of the industry this was not an extravagant affair – but it was an extremely well run and enjoyable two days, taking the best from previous conferences and making refinements as necessary. With the good support from Industry Partners **Ravensdown, PPCS/Richmond, Rabobank** and **Telford Rural Polytechnic**, delegates were once again able to enjoy excellent hospitality at a very reasonable price.

Information-rich presentations

Following the Branch Chairmen's meeting and mixer evening on the Monday, the conference proper kicked off the following morning, opened by Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Jim Sutton. The DEEResearch technical sessions brought together a good range of information-rich presentations, with a focus on pasture management, water quality, parentage testing and disease management.

The NZDFA Annual General Meeting that afternoon showed the benefits of good preparation, with most delegates well informed on the issues that came up for debate, and a good quality of discussion resulted.

The food festival idea from Timaru was successfully repeated at Wairakei, with local restaurants turning on an excellent range of venison dishes using great product from Richmond.

The formalities that evening were given over to the launch of the Landcare Manual and the Deer Farmers' Environment Awards.

The morning of day two saw a pared-back version of last year's open forum. No high-tech feedback gizmos this year and no time overruns. What we did get was a series of contrasting but very well constructed presentations that left plenty of time for discussion and participants feeling well informed and able to have their say.

Formal General Meeting

The late morning and afternoon sessions were devoted to the Deer Industry New Zealand Formal General Meeting. Once again, the staff and Board members had prepared stimulating and informative presentations, and once again deer farmers had no inhibitions when it came to quizzing the speakers.

If the previous 48 hours had been low-key, that all changed with the "C'est Magnifique!" awards night – a thoroughly entertaining and high-energy night in which the deer industry kicked up its heels and applauded its achievers.

This was a constructive and good natured conference. Participants could be well satisfied that the sponsors and the Tongariro Branch have upheld the high standards of previous years and taken on board the lessons learned.


There are full reports on the conference throughout this issue of *Deer Industry News*, and the proceedings of the Deer Industry New Zealand Formal General Meeting are enclosed as a separate booklet. 

Photo by Chris Parkinson



Agriculture Minister Jim Sutton opening the 2004 Deer Industry Conference.

Minister pays tribute to Sir Peter Elworthy

Agriculture and Trade Minister, the Hon. Jim Sutton paid tribute to his fellow South Cantabrian, the late Sir Peter Elworthy when he opened the 2004 Deer Industry Conference in Wairakei.

"He was very supportive of me, even though I was contesting a seat against his brother Jonathan Elworthy," the Minister recalled. "Sir Peter Elworthy believed in public service, in deer farming and the importance of farmer cooperatives.

"As the progenitor of the Ravensdown cooperative he didn't

give up easily. When the idea of a farmer co-op was taken over by the corporate sector, he organised farmers to take over the corporate."

Minister Sutton said Sir Peter was strongly committed to serving his community but was also a true capitalist.

Moving on to discuss trade, Minister Sutton said the progress on the WTO's Doha Development Round was going to precipitate a 'seismic shift' in international trade, with an end now in sight for agricultural export subsidies. He said good progress is also being made with 'Plan B' – the bilateral trade agreements such as the recent NZ/China acceptance of


a negotiation framework for a free trade agreement.

Constructive bilateral work is being carried out with Thailand, Mexico, Singapore, Chile, Hong Kong and the United States among others, he said.

"Trade negotiations may seem quite remote to real life back here in New Zealand. Change seems to happen at a glacial rate. But I can assure you that nothing else has quite the same impact on your livelihoods as progress in international trade.

"Research has assessed the overall benefits from the last big round of multilateral negotiations, the Uruguay Round, as at least \$9 billion over the 10-year implementation period, and about 17,600 jobs throughout our economy, including 2000 in agriculture.

"But the Uruguay Round was only a toe in the door. The Doha Development Round has even greater potential."

Minister Sutton said it was an exciting time for agriculture and deer farmers, and congratulated the industry for riding out the latest round of wild price swings. 

Positive debate from 2004 NZDFA Annual General Meeting

Tom Williams assumed the mantle, and continued the tradition, created by the late Sir Peter Elworthy in responding to the Chairman's report at the 29th Annual General Meeting of the NZDFA at Wairakei last month.

Over the years, Peter Elworthy had used the speaking opportunity to distil the feelings of deer farmers into a concise reflection on the 'state of the nation'. Williams admitted he was stepping into the role with mixed feelings. Nonetheless he picked up the responsibility with alacrity, and delivered a thoughtful response to the report of outgoing NZDFA Chairman Errol Croad.

Paying tribute to his predecessor in this speaking role, Williams said Sir Peter had cast a long and benevolent shadow over the deer industry, and his strong, dynamic and versatile leadership extended well beyond the boundaries of deer farming and agribusiness.

He said Errol Croad had correctly identified the key issue concerning deer farmers: profitability, and the entitlement of producers to a fair share.

Notes from NZDFA AGM

Please note that this report does not constitute the official minutes, but has been checked for accuracy.

Executive Committee Remits: Financial

Andrew Mitchell presented the Financial Report (see NZDFA Annual Report contained in *Deer Industry News* May 2004), noting the association had an operating surplus of \$13,326 for the financial year.

The **Financial Report** was accepted (moved Andrew Mitchell/seconded Andrew Fraser). CARRIED

The NZDFA **Commodity Levy** was fixed at nil (Mitchell/Taylor). CARRIED

Honoraria for the Executive Committee Chairmen and Members were fixed at an unchanged rate of \$7500 and \$5000 respectively (Mitchell/Croad). CARRIED

There was a symbolic amendment to this motion from Richard Valentine, who acknowledged the major workload carried by the Executive Committee. While the amendment (to raise the honoraria by \$2500 each) did not find a seconder, the sentiment was clearly appreciated by all.



From left: Bill Taylor, Andrew Fraser, Andrew Mitchell, Errol Croad, Tony Pearse.

The current **Auditor** (Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu) was reappointed (Mitchell/Taylor) CARRIED. It was noted the audit is now commissioned for a fixed annual fee of \$1500.

Constitutional amendments

These are printed in full in the NZDFA Annual Report, within the May 2004 *Deer Industry News*.

Amendment 1: Elected member

This was a tidy-up amendment following the passing of a remit in Timaru last year allowing the membership of elected members to the NZDFA. The effect of the remit was to insert the words "elected member" and references to the new membership category into appropriate clauses of the constitution.

The amendment (Croad/Parkinson) was CARRIED.

Amendments 2 & 3: Proxy

These amendments changed the latest time for the acceptance of proxies from noon to 4 pm the day before the AGM, and formalised a convention that allows the Chairman of a Branch or Affiliated Society to be appointed as a proxy.

The amendments (Croad/Clark) were CARRIED.

Branch Remits



1. Tongariro Branch: Depopulation Contingency Fund

The following remit was motivated partly by the case of a deer farmer in the Tongariro Branch, who had suffered considerable loss after a severe Tb outbreak on his farm.

"That the NZDFA in conjunction with DINZ work with the Animal Health Board to develop and implement a policy, within six months of this remit being passed, that will provide a contingency fund to allow financial support for the depopulation of a deer herd on the infrequent occasion when it is deemed to be the only recourse to control a severe tuberculosis outbreak."

Chris Parkinson/Geoff Burton

Discussion points circulated with the remit included:

- In the occasional, severe Tb outbreaks (e.g. 70% or more of herd affected), depopulation is the only practical option for control and preventing spread to neighbouring farms and is a valuable tool in rapid disease management.
- This puts severe financial strain on the farmer concerned.
- Compensation for depopulation at full market rate (for non-reactor animals) would allow the problem to be dealt with quickly and minimise risk to the National Pest Management Strategy.
- This is NOT a plan to compensate for all reactors – only for situations where depopulation is necessary. The movers do not support compensation along the lines of the dairy system.
- The movers envisaged that the compensation would be in the form of a top-up to full market rates over and above what they

would receive for reactors. They did not favour an increase in the AHB levy or full collective funding as per the dairy industry. Their favoured option was a change in AHB policy to reallocate existing funding to cover this cost.

- They estimated that, assuming a maximum 6 depopulations required per annum, that this would cost about \$250,000 per year. (In recent years, such situations would number 2-3 incidents/year.)

Points made **in favour** of the remit during discussion from the floor were:

- Faster depopulation in the local (Tongariro) case would have helped clear up the problem sooner and reduce risk of vector spread
- Farmers expected to sacrifice animals to protect neighbouring farms should be compensated
- Between 2-5 herds a year are hit hard with Tb – they need a fair go.

Points made **against** the remit were:

- A wider view on Tb is needed – remits like this pick off the issues piecemeal
- More freely available compensation may encourage farmers to use it as a way of exiting the industry (as in the UK FMD outbreak).

Other points made were:

- Existing provisions for compensation are extremely limited
- The industry needs to consider the whole issue of collective funding, and not focus too narrowly
- There might be problems defining trigger points for compensation, but these could be overcome
- It is the *vectors* that spread the disease to neighbours, not the infected animals
- Compensation should not be paid to people who are proven to have been negligent.

The motion was CARRIED on a voice vote.

Following this remit discussion a second, related resolution was presented from the floor:

Resolution for the collective funding of Tb control

“That the NZDFA works with DINZ to prepare and present a case for collective funding of Tb control within the New Zealand deer industry and that consultation with all deer farmers is carried out to ascertain whether the industry adopts such measures.”

Chris Parkinson/Malcolm Gilbert

At this point the AHB Technical Manager Kevin Crews repeated parts of the presentation he had given to Branch Chairmen the previous day. This resolution complemented the recommendations made in the AHB discussion paper (see separate article on page 12). The Board’s CEO William McCook noted that it will be difficult for the AHB to implement the National Pest Management Strategy for Tb without the ability to clear affected herds. He added that the purchase of infected animals under the Biosecurity Act is required to be at fair market value.

While there were a few reservations expressed, the resolution was CARRIED on a voice vote.



Animal Health Board CEO William McCook explains the Board’s views on how Tb clearance could be accelerated.

2. Taranaki Branch: Velvet grading

“That this meeting direct DINZ to simplify the grading system for deer antler velvet by:

1. Reducing the number of grades more in line with the Korean mix.
2. Cancel all long top grades completely.”

Graeme Hunter/John Cusdin

This remit provoked lengthy debate. (The rationale behind it can be found in the NZDFA Annual Report, published in the May 2004 *Deer Industry News*.) Key points made included:

- Current grades don’t reflect true value
- Existing grading guidelines are designed to put like with like – these concerns should be addressed to the Grading Review Committee
- It is not fair that one side is penalised because the trez tine is lower, but both antlers grow together
- Buyers are using the grading system to penalise NZ velvet.

The meeting then accepted an amendment to the original motion as follows:

“That this meeting directs the Velvet Grading Review Committee to review the grading system for velvet with a view to reducing the number of grades.”

The amended remit was put and CARRIED on a voice vote.

3. Canterbury Branch: Membership lists

“That Deer Industry New Zealand takes urgent action to remedy the inaccuracy of both the industry list and the list for paid members of all Branches, and ensure that these lists show appropriate and correct address format.”

Ed Noonan/Dave Wilson

Points raised during discussion included:

- Canterbury Branch membership list had ‘fallen apart’ since the industry list and AHB lists had been merged.
- Otago Branch had been able to improve their list by consulting local vets, stock agents etc
- DINZ is constantly working to improve the quality of the membership list, revamping the database, advertising for people to come onto the list and asking people to update details. A new database at DINZ is under final development.
- The merged list contained a lot of duplications, but these are being steadily dealt with.

CARRIED unanimously on a voice vote.

4. South Canterbury/North Otago Branch: Detained Tb Suspect carcasses

“That the NZDFA supports the Johne’s Research Group taking a lead role in organising and coordinating the input needed to develop and put in place procedures that will ensure the prompt and accurate identification of the status of Tb-detained carcasses.”

Peter Aitken/Jane Mitchell

Discussion points circulated with the remit included:

- When JD-infected deer carcasses have been detained as Tb suspects it costs the farmer financially and creates doubt about the Tb status of their farm.
- Remedying the system that gives rise to this problem requires someone to coordinate input from several parties involved (MAF, AHB, Asure NZ, labs and processors).
- The Johne’s Research Group has volunteered to provide this coordination and this remit seeks NZDFA endorsement.

CARRIED unanimously on a voice vote.

5. Waikato Branch: Supply management

“That this meeting directs Deer Industry New Zealand to immediately embark on an industry-wide examination/review to find solutions to better manage the supply of animals and velvet antler to processors, importers and exporters in order to match market requirements.”

Eric Clark/Mike Smythe

Points raised during discussion included:

- Better channels for market signals to farmers are required
- The remit is not seeking quotas, just a review
- If large corporate farmers retain hinds to build herds, it can distort the markets.

CARRIED on a card vote by 186 votes to 87.

6. Nelson Branch: Procurement premiums



As expected, this remit triggered some of the most animated discussion. It was motivated by persistent rumours that PPCS had been paying Landcorp a significant procurement premium. Opinion was divided into two well-defined camps.

Discussion points circulated with the remit included:

- There are suggestions that major processors are paying volume suppliers procurement premiums, which are “excessive and totally unjustifiable”.
- Parties involved have been unwilling to comment when approached.
- Smaller, struggling producers see these premiums as unfair and the last straw; many may leave the industry as a result, which will hurt the industry.
- The NZDFA needs to support its members and state its position on the matter.

Points made from the floor **in favour** of the remit included:

- Smaller producers need greater support – the NZDFA should support *all* members, irrespective of productive capacity
- New Zealanders *own* Landcorp – they should be fair and equitable and open their books to all
- There is a conspiracy to support the corporates and drive out the small producers

Points made **against** the remit were:

- This is tantamount to market intervention, and isn’t acceptable
- A contract can’t incorporate a premium – it is an independent agreement, not a spot price
- Landcorp has to perform the best it can – we should be concerned if they *didn’t* seek the best possible price
- It is not the DFA’s role to intervene in a commercial transaction. If you break the confidentiality provisions of your contract by releasing details, you deserve what’s coming

- It is preferable to be able to negotiate our own contracts, even as small producers
- Farmers are PPCS shareholders – it’s up to them to lobby their own Co-op for change
- It is up to smaller farmers to pool their stock and negotiate better contracts.

LOST on a card vote by 154 votes to 135

Life Membership: Norm Parkes, Punawai Deer, Nelson

“That Norm Parkes be awarded Life Membership of the NZDFA.”

Errol Croad/James Guild

Norm Parkes, profiled recently in *Deer Industry News*, was seriously ill at the time of the AGM.

In supporting the motion, James Guild said he had known Norm for 25 years. “With Norm, you got the full package – he is a very practical and committed person,” he said.

The motion was CARRIED by acclamation.

Sadly, Norm passed away after the Conference, on 7 July.

Johne’s Research Group (JRG) Report

Peter Aitken, Chairman of the JRG, reported to the AGM (see also NZDFA Annual Report). He said Johne’s Disease (JD) conservatively costs the industry \$12 million a year – a figure put closer to \$30 million by Professor Frank Griffin.

He said the science pursued under the AgResearch/FRST umbrella covered four areas: vaccine development (see separate article in this issue by Colin Mackintosh on research progress); diagnostic testing; genetic resistance and epidemiology (a 5-year project).

He said the epidemiology project had a couple of false starts but is now well bedded in with the appointment of Australian veterinarian Jamie Glossop to the project.

So far 10 case study properties have been identified, which will be part of a pilot study for the epidemiological study. About 60 farms of the 160 required for this study had indicated interest in taking part.

Farmers were urged to enrol in the study, which requires farms that are confirmed as either JD-infected or JD clear.

A substantial grant has been sought by the JRG from the Sustainable Farming Fund to continue this research over a 3-year period July 2004 – July 2007. (Since this report was presented, the grant has been approved, but as the budget was still to be finalised, a figure cannot be confirmed.)

The JRG has committed \$57,000 for the first year of the five-year epidemiology study, with Massey contributing \$83,000 and FRST \$50,000. The group is obliged to find a further \$90,000 for the following year, of which the SC/NO Branch of NZDFA has committed \$10,000. A number of other branches have also made considerable contributions, Aitken reported.

Elections

Executive Committee

As reported in the May issue of *Deer Industry News*, no election was necessary for the two vacancies on the NZDFA Executive Committee. The committee now comprises:

- **Andrew Mitchell: North Island – in second year of term (Chairman)**
- **Tim Aitken: North Island – elected unopposed to vacancy created by retirement of Errol Croad**
- **Andrew Fraser: South Island – stood down by rotation, re-stood for vacancy and re-elected unopposed**
- **Bill Taylor (South Island – in second year of term)**

As consensus on the chairmanship could not be reached within the

new Executive Committee, they turned to the Branch Chairmen for guidance, during the meeting the day before the AGM. The chairmen indicated a close majority support for Andrew Mitchell for the one-year term, a recommendation that was accepted by the committee.

The new constitution requires the Executive Committee to elect its own chairman (the NZDFA President was elected directly by members before the 2002 reforms). In order to avoid a repeat of the deadlock, the Executive Committee will consider alternative methods for selecting a chairman in future.

Selection and Appointments Panel (SAP):

North Island

There were four candidates for one vacancy. Votes were cast as follows:

Roger Aitken:	125
Richard Broughton:	50
John Cusdin:	95
Brian Marcroft:	83

Roger Aitken was declared elected to the SAP. As the second-highest polling candidate, **John Cusdin** has been appointed to the SAP for a period of 12 months to fill the extraordinary vacancy created by Tim Aitken's resignation as a non-Executive Committee member of the SAP.



Roger Aitken



John Cusdin



Bob Kingscote

South Island

Bob Kingscote has been elected unopposed to this vacancy. 🗳️

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Outgoing Chairman thanked



Adele and Errol Croad.

Retiring NZDFA Executive Committee Chairman **Errol Croad** – and his hard-working wife **Adele** – were thanked for their contribution to the Association at a presentation during the AGM.

Speaking on behalf of the committee, Andrew Mitchell said the Croads had worked tirelessly for the Association since Errol was first elected to the former DFA Council in 2000, and he had seen the NZDFA safely through the transition period from old to new structure.

He said Errol had had a long involvement with the Wellington/Horowhenua Branch and had been particularly active on Tb issues. His closeness to Wellington had been a mixed blessing, with regular trips from Otaki to the Capital required during his term of office.

The Croads had also been closely involved with the organisation of back-to-back conferences (Wairarapa in 2001 and Wellington in 2002), and through all this had managed to run an environmentally friendly and award-winning deer farm.

In reply, Errol, with characteristic honesty, said one of the most frustrating aspects of his job was that on the frequent occasions he had to drive to Wellington, the weather was perfect for fishing – a rarity on his part of the coast. “That,” he affirmed, “won’t be happening again.”

Rumpole Cup

There was a healthy field of 10 entries for this year's Rumpole Cup award for the best Branch or Affiliated Society Newsletter.

The winner was the **Otago Branch** newsletter, edited by **Peter Foster**.

Judge Alison Spencer, a Wellington agricultural journalist, said Otago was a clear winner with plenty of variety and effective communication of messages through a readable and well-presented A5 format. Wairarapa Branch was commended for its no-nonsense style and easy navigation.

She noted in general comments that Branches should be careful to acknowledge sources when articles are reproduced from other publications. She also suggested that in some cases the personal views of writers/editors can cloud the objective communication of issues to members.

Highlights: Deer Industry New Zealand FGM

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Despite current conditions, the message that came through clearly from Deer Industry New Zealand's Formal General Meeting (FGM) is that, while there is still a long way to go, there are positive signs of market-led improvements in venison markets. If proposed plans are approved, the coming five years will see: further repositioning of venison into retail markets; diversification of velvet into new Western markets (with sound support from scientific research); and patented wound-healing products.

Conference was reminded of Deer Industry New Zealand's role, mandate and purpose which is to assist with the orderly development of the deer industry and that it must operate "in partnership between the sectors to achieve common industry goals." To achieve this, Deer Industry New Zealand continues to operate under the *Three Partners: One Vision* strategy. Industry-agreed goals and programmes are a feature of activity as the industry sets plans in place for the next five years.

For venison, **year-round access for France** has been sealed finally and the decision announced in February. Sales have continued and France is earmarked for development in the industry's strategic plan.

Germany is currently seeing New Zealand Venison's biggest ever promotional campaign – *Sommerkampagne*. The initial \$800,000 programme has already leveraged over \$200,000 from market partners and benefits continue to grow as more importers become involved and agreed activities are extended. This follows a successful supermarket tasting tour.

Venison joint promotion activity leveraged \$2.89 from exporters, importers, distributors and retailers for every \$1 of levy funds. **Company presentations** from PPCS and Duncan & Co covered company specific promotional and market development activities and signalled room for improvements in producer returns.

A presentation on the **venison industry strategic intention document** outlined plans for the next five years to diversify 3,000 tonnes away from the traditional German foodservice sector towards a focus on building new demand in German retail and in France, Belgium, Holland, UK, USA, NZ and Australia. It is believed that better alignment of production and consumption will be achieved by targeting larger audiences through retail, increasing consumption throughout the year using clear New Zealand country of origin branding and through research to assist with providing larger deer earlier.

For velvet, highlights included the announcement of initial research results supporting the **continued use of existing velvet removal drugs and a five year plan to address velvet removal issues**. A new anaesthetic has been identified and is progressing towards registration as a "Plan B".

Recent achievements for velvet included gaining **sliced access into Korea** from 1 April and a further 30% **reduction of the Special Excise Tax** into the same market. Scientific developments relating to velvet's use for wound-healing, including two patents, **athlete trials** and the development of a new **Velvet Activity Index™**, allowing meaningful measurements and comparisons of velvet product quality.

The **Velvet & Co-Product Strategic Intent** has been published. Amongst its key objectives are the resolution of velvet removal issues and improving market access into Korea, China and Taiwan. Once velvet removal issues are resolved, promotion will be reinstated to improve awareness and create new demand, including diversification into new Western markets with the product soundly supported by scientific research. New wound healing products, protected by patents, will be taken to market.

continued on next page

An advertisement from the Sommerkampagne. The promotional competition has already attracted over 100,000 entries.



Infomercials have proven to be an important channel for sales of velvet products in Korea.

Four wise men throw out interesting challenges to conference goers

The open forum concept pioneered at the 2003 Timaru conference was used again at the Deer Industry Conference in Wairakei last month, but gone were the timekeeping nightmares and the high-tech electronic voting systems.

The four contrasting presentations on the morning of the second day of the conference were delivered to within seconds of the allocated timeframe, leaving plenty of time for conference goers to quiz the panel.

Be creative

Financial journalist **Rod Oram** opened the proceedings with his thoughts on the risks and opportunities facing deer farming.

He said a growth in the industry of 60-70% could be expected over the next decade. This was unlikely to come through increased volume – it would have to be through capturing more value for each animal.

Oram cited the oft-quoted example of lamb as an illustration of greater value from fewer animals. (Bill Taylor later noted wryly that 5 years ago the sheep industry was being



Award-winning financial journalist, Rod Oram, urged deer farmers to get creative and build value.

encouraged to emulate deer farming.)

Looking ahead to 2025, he said the trade environment would be freer with fewer subsidies – this also carried the threat of competition from places such as Eastern Europe, he warned. He also warned that countries like Brazil were already developing into the agricultural superpowers of the 21st Century.

“Mass customisation” was key for products like venison. He said high-value customers of the future will want to feel directly connected to the growers of the produce they consume. The role of science in developing sophisticated consumer products (e.g. nutraceuticals) should not be under-estimated, he said.

This will be done by developing new, direct channels into markets and building powerful brands that lock into consumers.

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Highlights continued...

Animal welfare continues to be one of the key issues, with vocal opposition to New Zealand’s velvetting methods from one German farmer group being rebutted with presentation of scientifically-based, factual information to German government officials. In addition, a Code of Welfare for Deer Farming is well advanced and has just been submitted to the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee.

Building and maintaining **positive links with deer farmer groups** around the world – including those in Germany, Britain, France and Norway – continues to assist with smooth resolution of market access issues in those markets.

Deer Industry New Zealand **represents industry interests** on an array of industry-good topics. Currently, these include animal identification, the new bio-terrorism regulations and Biosecurity legislation, the US country-of-origin labelling regulations, employment law reforms and changes to the HSNO Act, agricultural statistics and rules governing the dispensing of prescription animal remedies. In addition, the deer industry was the first industry in New Zealand to achieve the required number of field samples to support its transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE)-free status.



Executive Chef Graham Brown at a tasting event for chefs in Germany.

Through the Meat Industry Association assisting with 50% of CWD deer slaughter plant sampling costs, substantial savings have been achieved for venison processors.

Negotiations with other funding bodies were concluded, resulting in a significant reduction in deer industry contributions to the Animal Health Board and further decreases over the next four years.

Updates on the **DeerQA** programme review and a summary of the **Cervena** Trust’s review of the Cervena appellation were also presented.

An office move for Deer Industry New Zealand into shared premises with Meat & Wool New Zealand and the Meat Industry Association sees the three organisations

sharing board rooms, reception, finance and I.T. services. Further opportunities for co-operation and benefits are being explored.

Proceedings from Deer Industry New Zealand’s FGM, including presentations and speech notes, are included with this copy of Deer Industry News and can also be downloaded from the web-site www.deernz.org.

Four wise men continued...

Citing another example that gets deer farmers squirming in their seats – Zespri – Oram praised the way the kiwifruit industry had revitalised its fortunes after years of stagnation and the threat of product swamping world markets.

In a final burst of advice for the industry, Oram said deer farming faced huge opportunities and challenges. “The industry is young and making big strides. You have to work at world speed. Your focus should be on building value, not cutting costs. Your challenge is still to earn a good living with a NZ dollar valued at \$US90 cents. Our genius is in our creativity – not in using unmodified foreign models.”

Brand is everything

Former Game Industry Board Chairman and Palliser Estate Managing Director **Richard Riddiford** made a welcome return to the spotlight with a thoughtful presentation on the strategy that has taken his company’s wines to some of the world’s most sought-after niche markets.

He said that with about a 5-year lead-time for changing production, wine growers must anticipate consumer trends.

“Our brand is core to what we do,” Riddiford said. “If our wine doesn’t meet our quality parameters, we ruin our brand.”

The environment-friendly message – something that has increasing resonance for deer farming – does not necessarily command a premium any more, Riddiford warned. “It’s your passport to trade.”

He said Palliser had led the way in developing environmental standards for the industry.

During the Q&A session, Riddiford said large increases in New Zealand wine volume production would have little effect on markets, because we produce only 0.2% of world volumes. He noted that the largest and most successful New Zealand producers were already hooked into global distribution channels.

Size wasn’t everything either. The highly successful Dry River winery in the Southern Wairarapa produces only about 3000 cases a year, but they sell for around \$400. (Palliser Estate had made a bid for their neighbour but missed by some \$3 million!)

Riddiford finished his presentation with a rousing generic New Zealand promotional video, which drew an appreciative round of applause.

Deer need to pull weight

Straight-talking SheepCo Chairman and Meat and Wool NZ Director **Mike Peterson** gave a sobering presentation on where deer fit within an integrated livestock system.

He made it clear that at current returns, deer are not pulling their weight. To add to Rod Oram’s call for a quality focus, Petersen called for improved productivity. He produced figures indicating that for dry matter consumed, deer achieved far more modest liveweight gains than sheep or beef cattle.

“Deer use 30% more dry matter than other livestock. Integration with sheep and cattle helps, but they need to command a premium to compete, and it isn’t there.”

He said a lot of the feed consumed by deer was taken up by maintenance, not growth. (Rod Oram chipped in later with the comment that there was a tremendous upside for genetics to help here.)

Petersen called for more rigorous breeding performance and progeny assessment to help lift productivity. “Finishers see more variation within mobs than between mobs. I’ve heard of liveweight gains varying from less than zero to 400 g/day within a mob.”

Petersen also invoked the example of lamb to rub in the point, citing the “incredible” carcass weights of 17kg now routinely achieved.

While he agrees deer can be an important component in an integrated livestock system, he sees them coming a distant third in terms of value at present.

Venison should trade on strengths

Tim Ritchie, former Meat and Wool NZ man in Brussels and now with consultancy Cranleigh Strategic, rounded out the presentations with some thoughts on the market position of venison against other forms of protein.

Like some of his fellow panellists, he was impressed at the way lamb had shrugged off various life-threatening challenges.

He said it was not viable for venison to compete on price against proteins like pork and poultry, which are produced year-round and have high carcass yields.


“Venison must leverage its image for safety, quality, tenderness and healthiness – but we must educate our consumers.”

He sees merit in a cohesive supply chain, with product customised to more clearly defined market segments.

If the audience had heard enough about lamb, Ritchie gave them another serving anyway, noting that since 1990/91 lambing percentages had improved by 23%, liveweights by 18%, lambs sold/ewe by 66% and total volumes by 10%.

In summary...

The four presentations were very well received, and were acknowledged with sensible and well-thought out questions during the Q&A session. While there was never going to be any magic bullet answer, and while the four panellists didn’t always agree, they succeeded in throwing some fresh light on key opportunities and constraints for venison producers (velvet was not really discussed).

The forum was an excellent appetiser for the Deer Industry New Zealand Formal General Meeting that followed in the afternoon, and provided conference goers with some interesting benchmarks to appraise DINZ’s strategies. (A summary of the FGM is provided in this issue of *Deer Industry News* and a full version is enclosed as a separate booklet.) 

Industry needs to speed up clearance rate

While the overall trend in terms of total infected herds is still in the right direction, Tb-infected deer herds are proving stubborn when it comes to achieving clear status. More disturbingly, the reduction in the total number of infected deer herds appears to be stalling.

In their report to Branch Chairmen at the 2004 Deer Industry Conference, AHB CEO William McCook and Technical Manager Kevin Crews explained that in the year to April 2004, 70 percent of infected cattle herds had been cleared, compared with only 30 percent for deer herds.

If the clearance rate stays at this level, it would take until 2013 (the end of the current National Pest Management Strategy Period) to just halve the current number of infected deer herds, Crews said. Infected deer herds now make up nearly 26 percent of the total number of infected herds (deer and cattle combined), compared with less than 14 percent a decade ago.

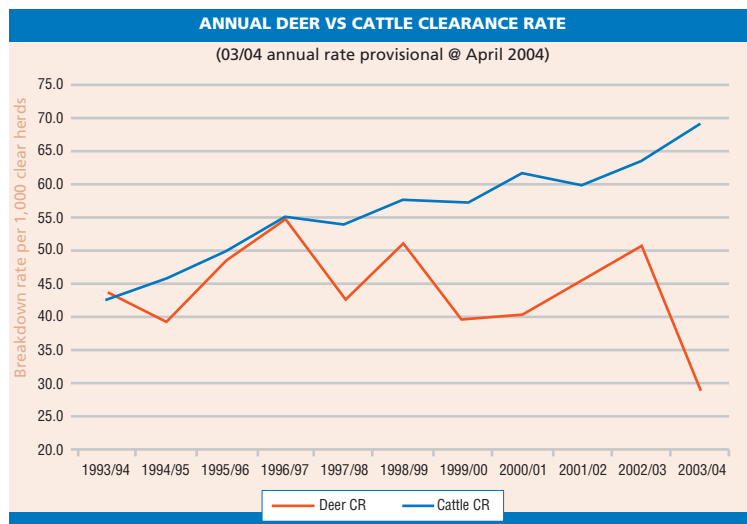
Factors in poor clearance rates

In a written report to the industry, the AHB highlighted a number of factors causing the poor clearance rate for infected deer herds:

- Poor herd testing frequency (annual or less) stemming from the high cost to farmers and lack of penalties or incentives;
- Ancillary testing dragging out the time to complete herd tests;
- Inability to quickly dispose of reactors, leaving infected animals within herds;
- Difficulty for farmers dealing with a large-scale breakdown, making it necessary to resolve the problem over an extended period to avoid a financial crisis.

The AHB is proposing a series of measures to help overcome the problem of herds which take an unduly long period to clear:

- Encouraging more frequent testing in infected herds, to reduce the risk of residual infection developing and shorten the length of time herds are on infected status.
- Parallel (ELISA) testing in infected herds in acute or chronic cases.
- Purchase at fair market value of Tb reactors and test-positives in acute or chronically infected herds in specified circumstances. This removes sources of infection more promptly and provides an incentive to test more frequently.
- An incentive payment to cover the cost of more sensitive serial (IgG1 ELISA plus BTB) testing to retest test-positive animals. This should increase the frequency of testing and reduce the risk of false-negative animals slipping through the net when re-testing is technically valid but not desirable.
- Extending the assistance available for cattle to deer, where additional financial support (e.g. for management advice) is available for farms where the Tb status has suddenly changed, threatening financial viability.



The graph that has the AHB concerned: Annual herd clearance rate comparison between deer and cattle 1993/94-2003/04.

Special Testing Areas (Fringe)

The AHB is also looking at the issue of the annual testing that's required in fringe areas, noting that of the 1660 herds tested in these areas in 2002/03, only two new infected herds were found. The Board is suggesting the deer industry should share the cost of this testing more equitably, to remove some of the funding burden from the deer farmers in these areas.

The AHB is also looking to part-fund Deer Research Laboratory's more sensitive IgG1 ELISA test for follow-up testing of positive animals found during annual testing in the fringe areas. Again, this will increase confidence that genuinely Tb-positive animals will be identified.

As a further string to the testing bow in the Fringe areas, the AHB is proposing to fund the purchase of test positive animals for slaughter in specific circumstances. In places where Tb-positive wild animals have recently been found, positive diagnosis of Tb in deer would help increase the sensitivity of surveillance of Tb in wild animals.

Positive reception

Branch Chairmen were generally positive about the AHB's suggestions. In discussion after the presentation, Kevin Crews noted that the effectiveness of vector control seems to be a bigger issue for deer than it is for cattle, with ferrets being especially troublesome in Canterbury and Otago. With the slump in the feral venison trade, wild deer herds could also be building up and creating a bigger reservoir of infection.

Chairmen were also quick to point out that finding killing space for reactors can be difficult – and putting dead animals in a hole in the ground on a property is not an option!

For a copy of the AHB discussion paper, contact Nick Hancox at the Animal Health Board: Tel (04) 472-2858, or Email hancoxn@ahb.org.nz

Awards night goes French

A French-themed awards night capped off a highly successful Deer Industry Conference at Wairakei last month.

The theme – “C’est Magnifique!” – was chosen to celebrate the recent announcement of enhanced market access to France. With the help of a hyperactive acting duo – the “Famous French Waiters” – conference goers got right into the spirit of the night.



The “Famous French Waiters” set the tone for the French themed Awards evening.

Of course the fun and French cuisine were only part of the evening – it was also held to celebrate the industry’s high achievers. Here is how the awards played out:

Warnham & Woburn Society Photographic Awards

This is the sixth year of the awards, and entries were as strong as ever. Once again, the **Warnham & Woburn Society** has supported the awards, and this year brought in a new prize sponsor, **Fort Dodge**, makers of **Cydectin**.

There were new faces among this year’s entrants and the high standard of photography achieved gives even more resources to show off the industry to the world. An interesting aside – all of the winners and place-getters bar one were women. Theories anyone? The winners were:

Open category

- 1st: *Sunset roar* by Bridget Hensley (featured on cover)
2nd: *Sunset before the storm* by Debbie Stowell

Humorous category:

- 1st: *Jeepers creepers, look at the peepers* by Debbie Stowell
2nd: *Just puddling* by Linda Scott

Popular vote: Open category

- Chilly breakfast* by Tom and Anne Evans

Popular vote: Humorous category

Misty morning play #2 by Bridget Hensley

The winners and other memorable photos from this year’s awards will once again feature in *Deer Industry News* and the deer industry calendar.

Matuschka Award

Winner of this year’s Matuschka award for the person making the greatest contribution to the DFA at grass roots level was **Craig Wilson** of Southland Branch.

In the citation for Craig, the judges said he was the ideal candidate for the award. He is quiet, but does his time on all of the subcommittees and activities, including help with the national velvet awards, field days and much more. He is involved with velvet judging and pitched in to help rebuild the velvet display stand. With a passion for velvet, Craig breeds excellent stags and runs a tidy sheep and deer unit.

The judges also noted the great support of Craig’s wife Tracy. Accepting the award on Craig’s behalf, Colin Macnicol said Craig is a shy but very successful man whose contribution was greatly appreciated by all who know him.

...and one for you, Murray

The normally loquacious Murray Matuschka was, temporarily at least, lost for words when he and wife Barbara were awarded Life Membership of the Tongariro Branch of the NZDFA during conference awards night. It was a fitting tribute to a couple who have given so much to the industry, nationally and locally.

The Deer Industry Award



Veterinarian and deer farmer **Ian Scott** accepting the Deer Industry Award.

As always, the judges had a difficult job selecting a winner from the six worthy nominees this year for the industry’s top award – sponsored by The Deer Farmer, NZDFA and Porter Holdings.

But choose they must, and this year’s winner was Tirau deer vet and farmer **Ian Scott**. Known for practising what he preaches, Scott was on the steering group for DeerQA and later became lead auditor for the on-farm QA programme. He is current chairman of the National Velvet

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Sunset roar by Bridget Hensley



Sunset before the storm by Debbie Stowell



Jeepers creepers, look at the peepers by Debbie Stowell



Just puddling by Linda Scott



Chilly breakfast by Tom and Anne Evans



Misty morning play #2 by Bridget Hensley

Landcare Manual crowns environment awards night

The launch of the much anticipated Deer Farmers' Landcare Manual topped off an enjoyable environment awards evening at last month's Deer Industry Conference in Wairakei.

One hundred and nine New Zealand deer farmers contributed to the manual, and their ideas have been distilled into a comprehensive document featuring practical how-to information, detailed case studies, and a wealth of related information for deer farmers looking to farm more sustainably.

The manual is very much a living document, and contains a feedback form to allow suggestions for improvements and additions to future updates.

The project was shepherded through its long and complex path by convenor John Paterson with the assistance of a project supervisors' group chaired by Bill Taylor and a deer farmers' management committee.

The three year project was funded through MAF's Sustainable Farming Fund, and is one of the biggest SFF projects of its type involving a publication.

The manual, which is being distributed free to all deer farmers with *Deer Industry News*, carries a special dedication to Sir Peter Elworthy, and it was a privilege for deer farmers to have Fiona Lady Elworthy at Wairakei to launch the publication.

During her speech, Fiona said she and Peter had wanted to honour the animals and the people who farm them, and encourage sustainable practices in the sometimes fragile environments in which deer are farmed.

Deer Farmers' Environment Awards

In this, the fourth year of the awards, the premier winner was a South Islander for the first time. The Premier winners of the Sir Peter and Fiona Lady Elworthy Environmental Award were Gore couple, George and Mary Scott.

The Scotts farm 356 ha of rolling hills, east of Gore. The property includes 120 ha of deer fenced land. They run a deer finishing unit with an emphasis on keeping deer stress levels to a minimum providing good quality shade and shelter, and healthy soil. They have a holistic approach to their farming, with a strong community involvement, and a keenness to promote deer farming as a sustainable industry to consumers around the world.

Deer Industry News will be carrying a more in-depth profile on the Scotts in a future issue, and details of their sustainable farming practices (along with those of the other award winners) will be published in a separate brochure to be distributed to all farmers.

The other award winners were:

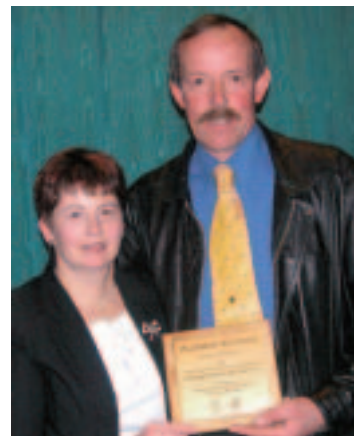
- Velpool Environment Award for an innovative and holistic approach to sustainable land management: **Ken and Kathy Swainson, Wheogo Downs, Sanson**
- Duncan & Co Environment Award for excellence in sustainable pasture management: **Brian and Jackie Wellington, Owairaka Valley, Te Awamutu**
- Rabobank Environment Award for sustainable growth: **Eweburn Farm, Landcorp**
- Fish & Game New Zealand Environment Award for excellence in riparian management: **Trevor Kenny, Foveran Deer Park, Kurow**
- Summit Quinphos (NZ) Ltd Environment Award for excellence and commitment to sustainable deer farming: **Clive and Elsie Jermy, Stanfield's Bushey Park, Palmerston** 🇳🇿



Fiona Elworthy with Anne and John Paterson: A framed cover of the Landcare Manual was presented to John as a memento of his task as project convenor.



Kevin Steel of MAF's Sustainable Farming Fund and Fiona Elworthy at the launch of the Deer Farmers' Landcare Manual.



Mary and George Scott, winners of the 2004 Premier Sir Peter and Fiona Lady Elworthy Environmental Award.

Awards night continued...

Standards Body, of which he has been a member for the past 12 years.

In his acceptance speech Ian Scott said his experience had taught him to accept mistakes and learn from them. He said being involved so closely in DeerQA did not always win him friends, and he thanked Collier Isaacs and MJ Loza for the support they'd given him.

He also acknowledged the current workload being shouldered by Rob Gregory and Janice Attrill at DINZ, and the ongoing

professional contribution of Professor Peter Wilson and Adrian Campbell, the new President of the NZVA Deer Branch.

Scott said the industry now needs the next generation to step up to the mark, and is concerned that, like sharemilkers getting into the dairy industry, young deer farmers need to see a positive path forward.

He also paid tribute to the support of wife Linda, with whom he runs a tourism operation at Oraka Wapiti. 🇳🇿

DINZ supports work on traceability

Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) has put its weight behind an urgent review of traceability requirements for New Zealand livestock.

In an interim response to a MAF Biosecurity and NZ Food Safety Authority discussion paper on support information systems for animal tracing, DINZ says the system should be implemented as a national good (taxpayer funded) for market access, food safety, biosecurity and incursion management purposes.

The discussion paper was commissioned in September 2003 by the Livestock and Animal Tracing and Information System (LAPTYS) Committee. In its preparation, interviews were held with an extensive list of stakeholder groups, including DINZ, Federated Farmers, Landcorp Farming Ltd, Meat New Zealand, the Animal Health Board and many others.


A primary focus of the discussion paper was the level of traceability required, the appropriate division of roles and responsibilities, and possible next steps. It discussed whether New Zealand should move to a system of electronic identification or whether the current system of optical tags and manual recording is appropriate and cost effective. It also raised issues such as the cost and access to new technology, commercial benefits, and the likely future requirements of markets and customers for different sectors of the livestock industry.

In its preliminary comments on the discussion paper, DINZ says the system should:

- be able to be accessed/used/updated by commercial operators for commercial purposes; and
- be cost effective and practical both from a farmer perspective, and a processor/exporter perspective.

DINZ also comments that New Zealand should not be too quick to accede to regulatory pressures from international markets driven by factors such as BSE or foot-and-mouth disease which do not exist here.

The response also identified a potentially serious flaw and commercial conflict if Agri-Quality, a commercial operator, manages a database of national importance as well as being in the commercial business of providing assurances. DINZ also noted that the industry's recognition of the benefits of electronic tags in relation to deer handling should not be taken as automatic support for a mandated system with electronic tags.

The establishment of working party of ag-sector representatives and officials including DINZ is being discussed and in its response, DINZ says it may well have other comments after consultation on a larger scale. 

Keep those brains coming

Following on from last year's achievement of meeting the national submission target of 300 deer brains for testing to support our Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)-free status, deer farmers are continuing the good work, MAF figures show.

During the calendar year 2003, 315 samples were submitted by farmers for testing. All but 25 of those were sent in during the second half of the year.

This year has started even more strongly, with 64 deer samples sent in by farmers for testing during the first 3 months (January-March).

Last year, as a one-off exercise, it was agreed between the NZFSA and industry that the target of 300 on-farm samples should be complemented by 3000 samples from DSPs. Submission rates from DSPs are also improving. A total of 1377 samples were sent in for the whole of 2003, and for January-April 2004 this figure has already reached 1138.

The on-farm sampling targets animals 2 years and older showing acute signs of wasting, pneumonia or neurological symptoms.

Deer Industry New Zealand and MAF pay incentives for farmers and vets respectively for the on-farm sampling, and the MIA partly funds the sampling of animals from DSPs.

Deer Industry New Zealand CEO MJ Loza says the figures for the first part of 2004 are very pleasing.

"It shows an ongoing commitment from farmers, veterinarians and industry to maintaining an intense level of surveillance to support our CWD-free status. While this is gratifying, there is absolutely no room for complacency. As an industry we must ensure that we continue to meet or exceed these monitoring targets." 

Producer appointments to Deer Industry New Zealand Board

Following formal interviews on 13 July, **John Scurr** and **Jeffrey Pearse** have been selected by the 2004 Selection and Appointments Panel as the nominees to the Minister to fill the two vacancies created by retirement by rotation from the DINZ Board this year. The selections are subject to any appeal under the Operating Code of Practice (Conflict of Interests) provisions within 20 working days.

There were no declarations of conflicts of interest made by the Panel or candidates at the time of the selection process.

Subject to this process, these nominations will be confirmed to the Minister formally on 10 August.

Tony Pearse Returning Officer, NZDFA

Venison

Production is up by a quarter on last year. While the schedule tracks the same time a year ago, it is still 32% lower than 10 years ago. Chilled exports have increased slightly and market diversification continues.

Schedule

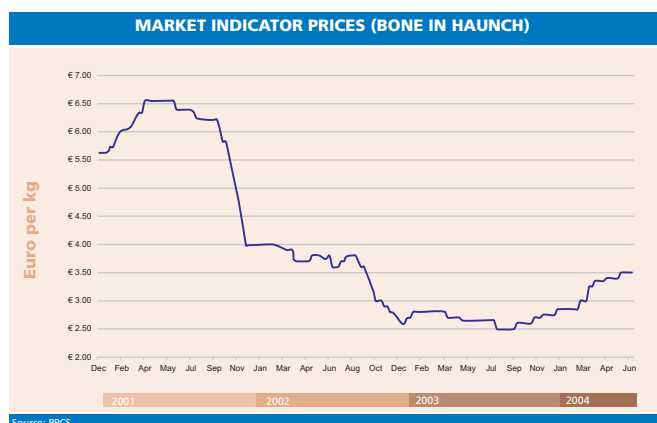
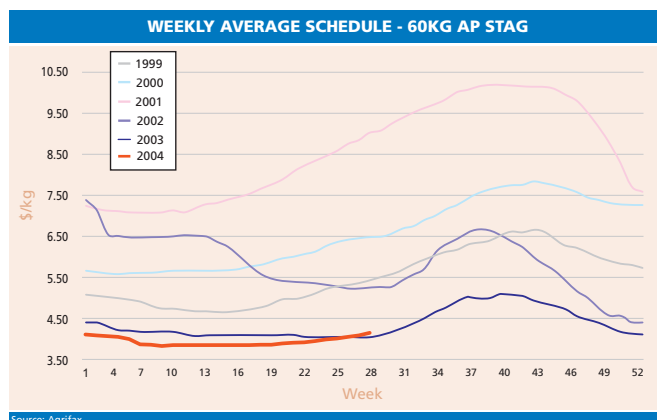
- The average published schedule for week 29 was \$4.28/kg, 8c above the average schedule for the same week in 2003, and 30.9% below the 10 year average schedule for the week (\$5.92/kg).
- The current average schedule, adjusted for currency on a trade weighted basis is 6% higher than that for the same week in 2003.

Production

- Venison production for the 12 months ended February 2004 was 594,626 animals – a 26.1% increase on the 12 months ended February 2003 and an 18.1% increase on the 12 months ended February 2002.
- Average slaughter weights (53.8 kg for the year ended February 2004) continue to track below those of recent years, being 0.7% below that for the 12 months ended February 2003 (54.1 kg) and 2% below that for the 12 months ended February 2002 (54.9 kg).

Exports

- Venison export earnings for the year ended February 2004 were \$162.9 million FOB - 4% lower than the same time last year (\$169.7 million FOB).
- For the same period, chilled venison exports were 2,464 tonnes, a 5.6% increase over last year.
- While volumes to key markets are growing, there is also a trend towards diversification of markets, with strong growth in some emerging markets. For the year ended February 1999, the top five markets accounted for 85% of venison export volume – whereas in the year ended February 2004, the top five markets accounted for only 75% of export volume. Markets outside the top five that are showing signs of continued growth include Australia, Italy, Switzerland, Taiwan and the United Kingdom.



The Markets

- There are continued reports of encouraging demand for legs, leading to gradual price improvements for leg items.
- Other items, including middles and shoulders have not seen the price improvements of legs. It has been suggested that firming leg prices are likely to help realign the price relativity between legs and other items over time.

Market Talk: Generic promotion support growing in UK

Veterinarian John Fletcher is a British deer industry pioneer, having started farming deer there in 1973. He has been Chairman of the British Deer Farmers Association (BDFA) several times and is currently chair of the BDFA's promotion committee. He has been a regular visitor to New Zealand and his core business now is selling venison, processed and packed on his own farm direct to the consumer.

Optimistic about the growing consumption of venison within the UK, John Fletcher reports BDFA estimates show 80% of wild venison produced from the 150,000 killed in the UK each year is now sold to the catering trade as opposed to being sent for export as it was a few years ago.

However, with an annual kill of 3,500, farmed venison is minute in comparison, he says. "Most of this is sold through the big supermarket chains, in a minority of stores, (alongside Irish and New Zealand venison) for consumers to cook at home."

As a preferred product for retailers in terms of quality, traceability and consistency, farmed venison prices have achieved a premium over wild venison for the past twenty years.

Velveting, illegal in the UK since the 1970s, was a sensitive topic with UK deer farmers envious of their New Zealand counterparts' ability to remove it. "It is accepted now that, realistically, we shall never be able to reverse that legislation and the trade-off is our closeness to the UK consumer. Farmed venison needs to reach a critical mass, to avoid being swallowed up by the growing volume of wild product."

New Zealand's promotional efforts – to date principally targeting the catering sector – have not promoted farmed venison enough, Fletcher believes, and have gone unnoticed by the general public or British deer farmers.

Velvet

Velvet exports are starting to move through in comparison to last year. While year-end March figures show a rise of 24% in volume over the previous year, this is largely previous season's stock as production has been stable. Export value remains depressed at 4% lower than last year. The Draft Velvet & Co-Products Industry Strategy to 2010 is being circulated and industry comments are sought.

Velvet Exports

- Export volume for the 12 months ending March 2004 is provisionally 194 tonnes dried equivalent. This is an increase of 24% over the year ending February 2003 (157 tonnes dried equivalent). However production has been stable.
- Export value for the year ending March 2004 is \$27 million - a decrease of 4% over the year ending March 2003, when the value of exports was \$28 million.

DRAFT Velvet Industry Strategy 2005-10

In the past few months, Deer Industry New Zealand has been coordinating the development of an industry strategy for velvet and co-products, the draft of which is summarised below. Full copies are available from Mark O'Connor – email mark.oconnor@deernz.org or telephone (04) 471 6113.

Brief Summary

The Velvet Industry Strategy is founded on the principle of industry partnership: where the industry collectively is in a stronger position with all partners working together towards common agreed goals and where individual companies also compete. Over 35 years, New Zealand has grown to become the largest producer and exporter of deer velvet in the world. It has a strong infrastructure. But it faces significant challenges.

The Challenges

- In the long term, velvet supply is increasing while per kg returns are decreasing.
- The industry is reliant on Korea which means: less competition for New Zealand's velvet; the market is over-supplied as production increases; if there is a problem in Korea, New Zealand velvet has few other options.

The Strategy

Six key objectives that lead to a sustainable New Zealand velvet industry:

1. New channels and New Zealand velvet products in South Korea

With little promotional funding, British promotional efforts have been focused, successfully, on public relations, he says, adding that good contacts with food journalists have been established. "There is scope, however, to enhance general awareness of the healthy aspects of venison, especially with the growing concern about obesity and the high cost of treating its consequences."

A relatively 'new' product for many British consumers, consumed at relatively low levels compared to their Scandinavian and German neighbours, there is no established preconception as to the retail price of venison. Modern British venison consumers tend to be young, health conscious and open to new foods, he explains.

John Fletcher believes that premium prices can be sustained and there is plenty of room for growth.

- Gain good **access** for finished product and distribute through same channels as local Korean velvet.
 - Lower border costs through **removal of the Special Excise Tax**.
 - **Joint and generic promotion**.
2. New sales of New Zealand velvet in Taiwan
 - Gain good access for New Zealand **frozen** velvet.
 - **Joint and generic promotion**.
 3. New sales of New Zealand velvet in China
 - Gain good **access** for traditional and non-traditional products.
 - Assist **development** of distribution arrangements.
 - **Joint and generic promotion**.
 4. Wound healing product derived from New Zealand velvet
 - Revenue from a **wound healing product** with benefits flowing back to the New Zealand deer industry (such as royalties and/or product sales).
 5. Athletic performance products derived from New Zealand velvet
 - Industry sales from **athletic performance products** based on research results.
 6. New product development opportunities for New Zealand deer velvet
 - New velvet **product development opportunities** flowing from research.

'Non Negotiables'

- The New Zealand velvet industry must meet – and be seen to meet - its **welfare obligations**.
- The products the New Zealand velvet industry sells must **be fit for intended purpose**, and shown to be so. Adherence to the Industry Agreed Minimum Standards and Velvet Activity Index™ will be crucial in this regard.
- **Existing market access** must be maintained (New Zealand/Australian harmonisation and USA regulations).

However, many of the original deer farming enthusiasts are reaching retirement, and conventional farmers are cautious about diversifying into an unsubsidised sector, so British farmed venison volumes are declining and there is less available funding for promotional efforts.

"Support is growing now for joint UK/New Zealand generic venison promotion, which could be mutually advantageous in increasing awareness and consumption of what is still a niche product."

John Fletcher's thoughts on UK venison promotion are distilled into his book 'Fletcher's Game' (available directly from the author at £16 including postage and packing, contact Dr John Fletcher, Reediehill Deer Farm, Auchtermuchty, Fife KY14 7HS, UK email tjohn.fletcher@virgin.net. telephone 00 44 1337 828369).

Stuart Natrass: move from boutique to value-added industry

The new Deer Industry Association nominee to the board of Deer Industry New Zealand is Christchurch-based Stuart Natrass.

Natrass, 42, brings a strong financial background to the board table having been involved in international financial markets, principally foreign exchange risk management, during his career, which started at South Pacific Merchant Finance in 1985. That company was later bought by The National Bank of New Zealand and he progressed to managing the Currency Options and Foreign Exchange business unit before moving, in 1997, to Westpac Banking Corporation and a later transfer to Sydney to become its global head of FX Risk.

Stuart Natrass has witnessed a substantial intellectual and skills drain on New Zealand's agriculture over the years and that is what attracted him to offer his commercial expertise back to our country's agri-business sector in 2001. He believes that New Zealand's continual challenge is how to attract appropriately highly skilled people back to agriculture.

Describing himself as a 'professional director', Natrass currently holds seats on a wide-ranging portfolio of agri-business interests: Cropmark Seeds Ltd; Wool Services International; South Canterbury Finance; Fonterra Co-operative Group; EstarOnline; and is chairman of Specialised Sales & Marketing.

Interestingly, Natrass's involvement with EstarOnline, a company that offers supply chain management solutions, began initially as an investor and an interest in small businesses that gravitate to conducting their sales and marketing on-line.

The Lincoln graduate in Bachelor of Agricultural Science (Hons), admits his 16 year banking career was a detour that "took a bit longer than planned" in achieving his primary goal,

"raising money to go farming". That 420ha property eight kms out of Geraldine at Gapes Valley, where Natrass grew up, now runs 6000 stock unit equivalents, being a mix of sheep, beef and deer. His deer herd consists of 650 hinds and 600 weaners and a 'handful of breeding stags'. The focus is on venison production.

Articulate and plain-speaking, Natrass is excited about joining the board at a time that the industry moves from a 'boutique business model', where a lot of structural weaknesses weren't seen, to a commodity-based model: "I'm interested in the transition period from the boutique to value-added commodity and believe that it is a good time to enter an industry at a cyclical low when industry participants are open to suggestions and looking for change."

He believes the main challenge, that he admits is not easily fixed, is addressing the poor on-farm productivity of deer, compared to other species: "They only multiply at a rate of 0.8 per year, they eat 33 kg of dry matter to produce one kg of meat – compared to 17 kg for cattle – and there is higher mortality and expenses involved in their production, such as fencing."

What this suggests for Natrass is a premium positioning for venison over beef, its main competitor and logical benchmark. "Venison needs to be taken out of its traditional seasonal positioning, it needs acceptance in the markets as a quality alternative to beef and needs, ultimately, to command a premium – 65-70% above beef, so that it can compete for land," he says.

Over the next couple of years, he perceives the major economic concern for agribusiness in general will be the rising interest rates. "It's never the exchange rate that destroys or makes an industry, interest rate cycles are always much longer and deeper, therefore potentially more painful," he says.

Sommerkampagne

The Sommerkampagne sales folder gives retailers and distributors details of the three advertisement treatments '*Sinnlich*' – New Zealand farmed venison's delicate, tender taste, '*Gastlich*' – the social side of summer cooking – and '*Köstlich*' – delicious – and outlines the media plan in popular women's titles, such as *Essen & Trinken*, *Brigitte* and *Schöner Wonen*.

- "*Sommerkampagne*", the industry's major summer retail promotion in Germany, continues to fuel strong consumer interest in New Zealand venison as it approaches the traditional German summer holiday season in July and August. The campaign, continuing throughout June, July and August 2004, involves advertisements in magazines, retail tasting tours, new in-store merchandising materials and a competition for consumers to win flights to New Zealand.
- As at 20 June, over 20,000 German consumers had registered their details on the industry website (www.nzvenison.com) to receive a venison recipe brochure and enter the competition. In addition to this, over 100,000 recipe brochures have been printed for distribution in supermarkets throughout Germany.

Stop Press: Great response to Sommerkampagne

German consumers have responded in their thousands to the Sommerkampagne promotion, with over 100,000 people having entered the competition so far. Mat Moyes is delighted with the strong consumer response to Sommerkampagne, with each entrant to the competition receiving a New Zealand venison recipe booklet.



So far, so good in the UK

A new venison ready-to-eat meal is on British retail shelves following development work by Richmond Ltd, its UK marketing office Richmond Lonsdale and one of their key ready meal manufacturing customers. Somerfield Supermarkets have run with the concept and included the venison dish in their So Good range of convenience meals.

Serving two, the new venison addition to the range features two raw 100g portion-controlled venison steaks contained within a twin-sectioned controlled atmosphere pack tray and accompanied by a pre-cooked mix of flat cap mushrooms and shallots and a sachet of burgundy sauce.

Richmond's venison manager Nick Sherwood explains that the product was developed in conjunction with a key UK ready meal manufacturing customer. "It meets British consumer demand for partially ready-prepared products, enabling them to feel that they "own" the finished dish after putting together and cooking the ingredients, yet retaining all the convenience required in a hectic modern lifestyle.

"We believe that this easy-to-cook ready meal is a perfect way to whet the consumers' appetites for New Zealand venison and the first step in persuading them to regularly add it to



British consumers are being tempted to try New Zealand venison in the Somerfield supermarket chain's premium ready meal range.

natural looking venison steak, which was reasonably priced. Sherwood explains this has been achieved by using chilled Denver Leg muscles, rather than more expensive loin cuts. These are aged for at least two weeks in their original vacuum packs before being processed to portion controlled steaks at the Richmond FoodTech plant in central Hawke's Bay.

Deer Industry New Zealand figures show that export volumes to the UK have grown in recent years, with almost 400 tonnes of New Zealand venison exported during the year ended February 2004, compared with 271 tonnes for the same period in 2000. 🇺🇰

their shopping lists," Nick Sherwood says.

The So Good product has a shelf-life of eight days and each pack is priced at £4.99. Currently on trial at 21 main Somerfield stores in the south-east and south-west of England and Wales, it has recently been nominated for an award in the prestigious Q Guild of Butchers national British awards.

The venison steaks were developed by Richmond to target caterers, manufacturers and retailers with a portion-controlled, consistent and

First venison training qualifications at Richmond

Twenty nine of Richmond Ltd's venison processing staff received 64 national awards in the first ever graduation ceremony held for the company's Te Kauwhata venison plant in the Waikato in May.

The ceremony was "one out of the box" for the staff, who worked hard to earn their National Certificates in Meat Processing & Venison during a period when venison production at the plant was at record levels, Regional Training Coordinator Cora Bowden says.

Part of a four-year strategy by the company to link the work done on plant to unit standards and national qualifications, the aim of the training was to raise the standard and quality of work done, as well as to continue staff development. The

courses covered health and safety, working in teams, problem solving together with anatomical and nutritional aspects. The qualifications also recognised expertise in butchery knowledge.

There were some initial challenges for the team preparing the training at Te Kauwhata: venison material had to be originated from scratch; trainers were brought in from the company's Te Aroha beef plant to facilitate the training; and there was also the issue of staffing the plant while training was going on, Bowden says. These were met by working with the New Zealand Industry Training Organisation (NZITO) which assisted with subsidies for the initiative to pay for training/preparation of resources, and with management planning processing for three days to allow the base training to occur. Afterwards, a lengthy process of assessment was undertaken.



Alongside improvements in plant compliance and all the implications that has for further improved product quality, Te Kauwhata Plant Manager Steve Tee has observed a growth in interest in other areas of training and a better awareness of other activities in other departments in the plant.

"Their sense of achievement is strong, confidence is boosted and morale at the plant has had a significant lift," Bowden says, adding that word is getting out there amongst the staff from other plants and that requests for developmental training are flooding in. 🇺🇰

Nationally certified: some of Richmond's Te Kauwhata plant staff who received National Certificates in Meat Processing & Venison at the company's first graduation ceremony in May.

Local food hero enthusiastic about domestic market

Seizing an opportunity to participate at a Guild of Food Writers breakfast in Wellington for British chef and food writer Rick Stein, paid off for a small central North Island venison producer, Pohangina Valley Venison.

Director Robin Ferguson says that since exhibiting his steaks, legs, shoulders, sausages and rosemary, port and venison pies at the event, which marked a small selection of the region's local food heroes out for the celebrity chef, he has had a number of good enquiries, including from top Wellington restaurants, and also a half page spread in *The Dominion Post*.

A small producer from a 24 hectare section in the Pohangina Valley near Palmerston North with approximately 180 Warnham deer, Pohangina currently sells directly to restaurants and the public via mail order. However, a new retail outlet alongside Ocean Fisheries in Palmerston North will open soon and another similar one is planned for Wellington. "What this means is that the public will be able to come in off the street and purchase venison at affordable prices," Ferguson says.

One of his key catering customers is chef Adam Newell of Zibbibo Restaurant in Wellington, who is passionate about the quality of the Pohangina product. The deer farm and venison will be featured alongside a recipe in a new cookbook to be launched by Newell later this year.

Ferguson is enthusiastic about the potential for venison on the local market and is seeking more land to lease to expand his herd and also linkages with other producers to join himself and marketing business partner, Billie Scott, in meeting demand. 📺



The simple but effective presentation that attracted interest in Pohangina Valley Venison's product at the Rick Stein breakfast in Wellington in May.



Silver Fern Venison Mince and Diced Venison are being added to PPCS' successful Silver Fern range.

Silver Fern Venison® range expands

It's all "go", with the PPCS Silver Fern Venison range.

Not only are two new products due to appear on South Island New World and Pak'n Save supermarkets shelves in coming weeks, but a television advertising campaign promoting the range is due to hit TV screens in August.

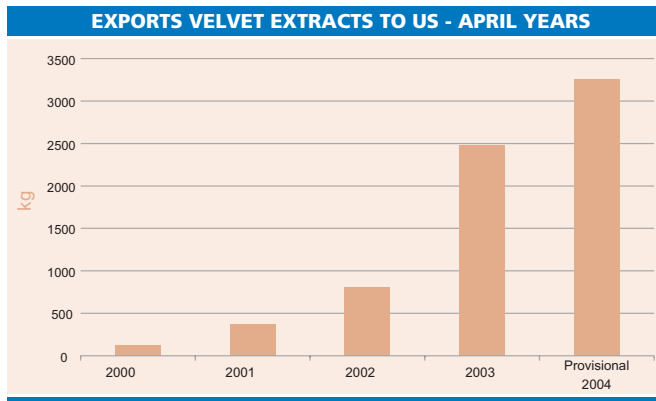
The campaign features Deer Industry New Zealand chef Graham Brown and aims to demonstrate how "quick and easy" it is to cook Silver Fern venison products.

The new products – Silver Fern Mince and Diced Venison – join the already popular Silver Fern Venison Stir Fry and Medallions.

Via Richmond distribution channels, plans to expand supply into the North Island are progressing. There are already a handful of Wellington supermarkets stocking Silver Fern products.

United States: extracting value from dietary supplements

Extracting the maximum value for New Zealand velvet from the massive United States dietary supplements sector requires innovation, commitment and most of all credibility, say some of the major companies involved in exporting velvet extract products to that market.



Estimated at some US\$18.5 billion, there is no doubt the market has huge potential, but in recent years it has been slow moving. The recessionary atmosphere in the States might have been a factor, but inflated health claims and scandals have also taken their toll. One particular product, based on a Chinese herbal remedy, was determined to have sped up metabolism so much it caused the deaths of several taking it. The US Food & Drug Administration (FDA) banned the product and has taken a close look at tightening the regulations governing the dietary supplements industry.

“The regulations look like they have some teeth,” says Velvet Antler Research New Zealand (VARNZ) Board member, Dr Jimmy Suttie. “The days of the cowboys are effectively over.”

Suttie agrees with exporters Ross Keeley, chief executive of BioProducts NZ Ltd, and Daniel Harrison of Elixir Technologies that this particular market segment has matured.

“Most recognise there is now the need for robust science to back health claims,” Keeley says.

Another issue, identified by Harrison, is the number of imitators and the lack of innovation that makes it difficult for the consumer to determine what is a quality product. “The biggest thing is credibility, and avoiding the image of a fad product,” he insists. “The potential will never be realised if everyone leaps in with a copy. It will sink the market.”

Harrison’s company is working hard behind its Gold Mountain brand range – which includes Velvamax, Pantocrin Velvet Antler Extract, Velvet Supreme and two products available in sub-lingual spray and tablet form IGF-PRO and AElixir – to ensure it has the necessary back up behind its claims. This includes some consumer research. “I was very impressed with the science at ASPT2,” he says, “but there is a big problem with applying the science at a commercial level.”

He strongly believes that adding value is the best way to produce returns for the New Zealand deer farmer.

Suttie says use of the Velvet Activity Index™ will be important to allow consumers to assess the quality of the product they are buying.

Exports of New Zealand’s velvet extracts to the United States have exploded over the past five years

Sub-lingual sprays for applying velvet extract directly under the tongue, like this one from Gold Mountain’s range, are attracting interest from US consumers.



by 25 times to a provisional 3,261 kg in the year to the end of April, accounting for 75 percent of total worldwide velvet extract exports. But, as Jimmy Suttie points out, this has come from a very low base. In 2000, exports totalled just 127 kg, and sales are still relatively modest.

“When it was first launched into the US market, velvet was an unknown product without a clear message of efficacy and it entered a very troubled market. If it had been possible to price velvet lower and had we had the science, it would have gone much better,” he says.

Pricing is still an issue, but business is certainly picking up. This is down to not only more marketing activity from the New Zealand end, but in-market pull as well, Suttie says.

New Zealand velvet extracts are supplied for use in sub-lingual sprays where most of the growth has been, according to Suttie – for direct and instant application under the tongue – and in droppers, capsules and tablets. Keeley says BioProducts is working on a rapidly dissolving sub-lingual tablet and there is talk of a transdermal patch.

With over eighty million well-educated and affluent American baby-boomers approaching retirement, the main market is predominantly for velvet’s anti-ageing properties.


That is where BioProducts pitches its products, mainly raw material for manufacturers. Extracted using a number of different methods, it offers services and a ‘total solution’ for its customers to meet their specifications. With quality assurance procedures in place, consistently high quality standards are met. Developing prototype products is part of the approach to show how velvet extract can be delivered.

The company exhibited, for the fourth time, at the world’s largest nutraceutical fair, Natural Products Expo West, this year held in March in Anaheim, California. With over 30,000 trade visitors, Keeley says his company’s main aims were to provide technical support for its manufacturing clients who were also exhibiting at the show, and to educate visitors about the product’s potential uses. “But we picked up a number of prospective customers and our customer base has expanded.”

The other key sector is the small, very competitive but potentially very lucrative sports nutrition market, said by market commentators to be poised for strong growth. The 40,000 serious body-builders in the United States are estimated to each spend an average US\$1,000 per month on sports nutrition and supplements.

Daniel Harrison and Elixir exhibited at the American College of Sports Medicine’s annual meeting, attended by 5,000 sports professionals, at which results from Craig Broder’s industry-funded athletic performance research was presented.

Harrison says interest was good and he was looking to assess trends and educate the delegates. The scale of the event and the immensely strong competition “blew my mind”, Harrison says, but he took away “plenty of good ideas.”

Harrison is adamant that, although times are tough at the moment, those who persevere will succeed. “If anyone is going to take this product, US consumers are.” 

Deer handling equipment – stress management the key

They might graze the same pasture and even use some of the same animal health treatments, but there will always be fundamental differences between the behaviour of deer and their more sedate sheep and cattle neighbours. Handling these flight-responsive but gregarious animals with safety is influenced by a combination of factors, among them species, selection for temperament, behaviour (human and deer) and good design of facilities.

Not surprisingly, deer can be stressed by normal husbandry practices: handling, overcrowding, isolation, mixing of settled groups and sudden changes to routine can all contribute. While stress can't be avoided altogether, it can be minimised through experienced stockmanship – firm and confident handling, allocating time for the job based on efficiency, not haste and a good feeling and understanding for the way deer perceive the world.

Well designed and operated handling facilities also play an important part, and there are some compelling reasons why restraint equipment – and expertise in using it – is such a crucial investment:

- Safety – not only your own, but also that of your employees under the OSH Act.
- Welfare – the obligation to handle deer safely, without undue stress or risk of injury, is explicitly covered in the Code of Welfare for Deer, now at the industry consultation stage.
- Quality – deer that are stressed or injured will not produce quality velvet and venison or conform to QA standards.
- Financial – just as for quality, poorly managed stock will cost you money.
- Public perceptions – like it or not, the way you manage your animals forms public perceptions of product quality and attitudes towards our industry.

The draft Code of Welfare for deer, while still subject to change after industry and public consultations, and approval by NAWAC, specifically addresses restraint equipment. It notes the importance of matching restraints to the type of deer being handled. A number of best practice recommendations are also proposed, covering time each animal spends in a restraint, cleanliness, access and positioning, lighting and pressures used.

There are a number of different deer handling products available around the country, which have evolved along with knowledge of deer behaviour and the developments of more exact standards of safety and welfare. *Deer Industry News* spoke to three people in the deer handling business: Kelvin Kimber, Ged Newlands and Bob Heenan.

Mobile restraint for hire

Deer farmers in the central South Island have an alternative option, a trailer-mounted restraint that Kelvin Kimber takes to farms that do not have sufficient need to buy or build their own gear. Kelvin, who lives at Hororata, has been taking his fully enclosed trailer to farms between Timaru and Kaikoura for four seasons now, pulling up next to deer yards or even in the middle of a paddock, using a small portable pen.

Kelvin is used to handling deer as he managed a large deer farm for over 20 years. His main occupation these days is building deer yards and he worked with an engineering

company to design and build the portable restraint. A hydraulic system allows it to drop to ground level, and the stock can walk straight through, in one end and out the other.

He says a lot of small farmers can't justify owning their own gear, and he is called out to help with anything from artificial insemination, pregnancy scanning, Tb testing, velveting to a range of vet treatments or tests.



Kelvin Kimber's portable setup is ideal for smaller operators who cannot justify the cost of an on-farm restraint.

Simple and maintenance free

Mossburn builder, Ged Newlands, has developed a very simple deer handler with only four main components. He says it is maintenance free, manually operated and is so flexible it can also be used as a pen when it is not needed as a restraint. Ged has been around the deer industry for a long time – in the early days he captured a lot of deer. As a builder, about 90 percent of his work comes from the deer industry, either building deer yards or restraints.

Ged says his restraint holds deer without stress, and can be used by farmers for all the normal procedures such as velveting and Tb testing, and features a vet door at the rear to give access for pregnancy testing. It is also possible to include a semen collection door, and a hand crank can raise the side walls so it can be used for larger animals such as elk. He claims it is safe for both workers and animals, and says he hasn't had any reports of any damage to either. "You would have to do something very silly to hurt yourself," he says.

Design refined over 3 decades

Christchurch engineer, Bob Heenan, has been making his restraints for over 30 years now. He had been manufacturing a handler for sheep farmers, and was approached by a deer farmer who was wanting something similar designed specifically for deer.

continued on next page...

New Executive Committee Chairman maps busy schedule

A successful professional career in the corporate world, a passion for farming deer, a five-generation family commitment in the rural sector and improving stock productivity through excellence in genetics, are some of Andrew Mitchell's credentials to lead the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association into its next round of challenges.

After two years on the Association's Executive Committee, Andrew is now ready to tackle his new role head-on and has already developed a list of major issues he believes must be focused on, debated and actioned before next year's AGM. He also believes in a no nonsense approach – say what you think, allow others to do the same, and don't hold grudges.

While his agricultural credentials are solid, it is his business and management skills that are going to prove invaluable over the next couple of years. As a young man he left the family farm in Hunterville and moved to Wellington to join the corporate world of computer technology. By the time he returned to full-time deer farming, 19 years after leaving the family farm, he had been general manager of a software company before he was 25, and later headed the New Zealand branches of two multi-national Australian then European computer software and consultancy companies.

Andrew agrees that his business career has given him skills and disciplines that will translate well into his new responsibility, particularly the need to work with and lead a large team – the Executive Committee of four, plus the 27 Branch and Society Chairmen. He describes them as an exceptionally talented group of individuals that have taken on some exciting projects within their Branches.

A key ambition is to have some of the less productive workloads of the Branch Chairmen distilled back to the Executive Committee – he wants to see the Branch Chairmen more able to spend their time on industry-good projects, bettering their businesses, and fostering the activities that make Branches more enthusiastic and fun.


He compares the role of the Branch Chairmen to a board of directors, setting policies to benefit the whole industry, and with governance responsibilities. Continuing the business

analogy, he sees the Executive Committee as being similar to the management team, responsible for the day-to-day administration, and implementing policies developed by the 'board'.

The next 12 months are going to be hectic ones for the Executive Committee and the Branch Chairmen. On top of the 'normal stuff', Andrew has a target list of significant areas that he wants to focus on. He has distributed the list to the rest of the Executive Committee and wants to get underway on some of them immediately – as directed by the AGM.

At a planning meeting in Christchurch in mid July, the Committee looked at how this can be achieved, the allocation of portfolios, formalising roles, and the steps needed to start getting on with the task. They also looked at how to work smarter with the Branch Chairmen, who he wants to meet on a more regular basis, and to have this backed up with regular conference calls.

Leading issues include:


- The review of Tb collective funding
- Branch structural review
- Supply chain management
- District and regional environmental plans
- The roll out of the Landcare Manual, itself a very pioneering project. 



Deer handling continued...

Working closely with the farmer he came up with a basic design, which he has modified and improved over the years to meet the various demands of farmer safety, animal welfare and greater efficiency, as well as introducing modern technology. His engineering company has now manufactured over 550 of his deer workrooms, and they have attracted considerable interest from overseas, resulting in exports to over 20 different countries, including a container load which went to Russia and some to Japan.

The latest versions are much more sophisticated than the original prototype. They feature hydraulic controls so one operator can easily move the workroom walls into place, thick padding on the walls to protect the animals, adjustable-height walls to suit different sized animals and, as the walls can be moved smoothly into fit an animal's shape, it feels that is walking into any ordinary room.

Bob Heenan proudly describes his product as "impressive" and says that unless the operator is careless or negligent it would be difficult to cause any injury, either to animal or operator. 



The hydraulic controls of the Heenan Workroom.

Affiliated Society profile: Grant Muir – Elk/Wapiti Society

The newly elected president of the New Zealand Elk/Wapiti Society of New Zealand, Grant Muir, is a Coaster through and through.

His grandfather sold his riverside South Westland farm to his daughter and son-in law in 1958. The family stayed on the Whataroa dairy unit until 1967 when they were flooded out. The farm was absolutely totalled – fence to fence shingle. It is now the bed of the Waitangi River.

With Marginal Lands Board assistance the Muirs re-established themselves on a new dairy farm in Harihari and, in due course, Grant took over the property.

After badly injuring an ankle in the early 1990s, Grant and his Australian-born schoolteacher wife Beverleigh opted for a change of lifestyle. In 1992 they shifted to 21ha of flat land with a ‘wicked’ view of native bush and the Southern Alps. They now run a luxury accommodation lodge there – *Wapiti Park Homestead*.

The farm was already set up with 100 ‘easy care’ Red hinds and a couple of stags. The offspring were sold as weaners.

So why Elk?

“I was never really enamoured of Reds. They’re too much like sheep! I have always had a fascination with the Wapiti but had never had the opportunity to hunt them. When I learned they were being farmed, what better way to further that interest, than to have a year-round relationship with them? We went to a dispersal sale in 1992 and bought a number of cows and young stock, some of which were purebreds. Then we picked up more, plus our first known purebreds and a couple of bulls at Brian Kenton’s inaugural sale and the Wapiti Park stud was established.

“We have upgraded with AI and pure bulls to the point where we now have a pure herd of Rocky Mountain bloodlines.”

Grant says the Elk is a big animal and while a herd animal to a degree, it is more of an individual than the Red.

“The cows can be up to 300 kg plus liveweight and bulls up to 550 kg. They are excellent in a paddock setting, but over-

protective at calving time. In general they don’t like the shed and you don’t back them into a corner in the wrong mood.

“When a 350 kg animal starts grinding its teeth and standing tall, you look for another way of moving it!”

However with the right facilities, says Grant, Elk are easy to handle. To work them, you need to be able to see what they are doing, and for them to see what is going on. “They can get a bit over-confident in a darkened shed because they can see better than you can; you never give such a big animal any advantage.”

Grant has been with the Society since buying his first Wapiti. He attended an AGM in the early 1990s and then got involved by attending council meetings as an ‘interested member’ and putting forward his views in Society newsletters.

“When you make a noise, you get a job, and I was elected to council about 10 years ago.”

The society had about 150 members in the early days, including overseas members. The current membership is about 95 – a decline that Grant says is symptomatic of the state of the industry. Strategies will have to be devised to counter this.

The Society is a nationwide body with a small North Island sub-committee. The vast bulk of the farms are in the southern South Island. “The Elk like the higher, drier country such as inland Otago. They like a good, hard winters which promote good velvet and antler growth,” says Grant.

Fiordland, while wet, has a cold, hard winter and Elk have always done well there. The general Westland climate, being warmer and wetter, means Grant gets better body weights for age but slightly less antler velvet; that is why his bull herd is now share-farmed at Sheffield – also closer to the live sale and trophy markets.

- **In part 2 of this article, Grant will air his views on marketing of Elk products.** 

Deer Improvement delighted with AI results

Industry newcomer Deer Improvement is delighted with conception rates achieved in its first mating season. Scanning has been completed in customers’ herds as well as those herds under contract for progeny test purposes, and the average is just shy of 70%.

Company director Peter Gatley says the thing that impressed most has been the consistency. “We’ve analysed the data from every angle – by stag, by batch, by herd, by technician, and the results clearly show that artificial insemination of deer is an efficient and effective process that can put the very best genetics within reach of every commercial farmer.”

Deer Improvement’s parent company, Livestock Improvement Corporation, employs a thousand technicians to perform three million inseminations each year in dairy cattle. Many of these are farmers themselves, and the team includes several hundred women. There was no shortage of volunteers for training on deer, and the lucky 12, including one male, were literally hand picked.

“For AI in deer, size does matter,” says Sean O’Sullivan, a

Deer Improvement manager with years of experience managing LIC technicians in the South Island. “Most of our team were new to deer when they arrived for training at Invermay, but with hundreds of thousands of cattle insems between them, we expected them to pick it up quickly. The scanning data shows only a seven percent range in their performance, so there’s no doubt they’ve all performed.”

Peter Gatley says another pleasing outcome of the season was the success of fresh semen. “Stags produce relatively small amounts of semen, and only on a seasonal basis, so it’s important to make the most of it. An ejaculate that would provide 100 straws of frozen semen is enough for 1000 straws of fresh, and it also diminishes complications relating to stags whose semen doesn’t freeze well. It all adds up to a more efficient and reliable service at lower cost.”

NEW ZEALAND DEER FARMERS' ASSOCIATION AND ASSOCIATED SOCIETIES: CHAIRMEN AND SECRETARIES Current as at 7th July 2004

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Of concrete stags and the power of morning tea

A real heavyweight stag will benefit Johne's research funds.

Murray Matuschka of Taupo has donated his latest prize one-tonne stag to the Tongariro Branch of NZDFA to raise money for the Johne's Research Group (JRG), and he says: "Any bid over \$3000 is in with a good show." The stag, unfortunately, is not one tonne of prime venison and velvet – rather it's a tonne of finely sculpted concrete.

It will be on tender for a couple of months and the excess over the artist's costs will be donated to the JRG.

Murray is more than a deer farmer – he is also painter, sculptor and tourism operator. The art started at school where he found he was "reasonably good at it". But he didn't actually get recognised until he was a guest speaker at an early deer conference in Rotorua. He was doodling on a pad while other proceedings took place and Alan Ford sneaked it away and published it in the next newsletter. Ever since, he has had commissions.

The first sculpted stag came about in 1982 in England. Murray had seen a magnificent concrete sculpture near Portsmouth and reckoned he could do one too. So he made one and sold it.

Several stags later, he is itching to have someone commission one in bronze. "The fine detail work you can get in bronze is something I dream about. You can make the mould in Plasticine and play with it for months getting it exactly right. With concrete you get one shot."

Murray has been farming deer for over 30 years. His 187 ha property carries a commercial herd of 1200 deer, as well as a hunting block. The farm-based tourism side of his business, he hopes, will create the larger slice of the income in due course. "Tourists come, they go, they pay."

Tourists do not need vets or looking after all hours of the day, are not subject to fluctuating prices or demands, only need to be fed morning tea, don't need drenches or whatever, and seldom need their antlers removed.

"We are well set up here for tourism: close to Taupo with views over the forests, geothermal steam and all that."



I thought this would look nice on the patio, deer...



Murray and Barbara Matuschka: Murray accepts Life Membership of the Tongariro Branch at the recent Deer Industry Conference in Wairakei.

A lot of the tourist side of the Matuschkas' operation is corporate-based. The Matuschkas are only 5km from the Wairakei hotel complex and many groups come to the farm for dinner in the special antler-lined facility. "It's a change of pace from the hotel," explains Murray.

Murray's long involvement in the deer industry was recognised last month with life membership of the Tongariro Branch. Murray said he was stunned. "The cliché is true – I couldn't think of a word to say. But I was very proud."

According to Murray, all the sayings about leadership and being a team man don't compare to one great truism you will not find in the text books.

"The power of morning tea. It's one of the great levellers and coming together activities. My wife Barbara has made morning tea for thousands from around the world and around here. By that act alone she has as much to do with me getting a life membership as anything I have done."

To tender for this magnificent sculpture by Murray Matuschka and help boost Johne's research funds, contact Geoff Burton, Chairman, Tongariro Branch DFA, 833 SH1, RD1, Taupo 2730, Tel: (07) 377 3304.

Geoff needs your name, address, contact phone number and the amount you are tendering. He notes that the highest or any tender will not necessarily be accepted as there is a reserve. If requested, the sculptor will deliver the stag; the purchaser will pay half the cost of delivery.

Tenders close on 31 August 2004. 

The Editor
Deer Industry News

Dear Sir,

My family, Charles, Forbes, Josephine and Eve and the manager of Craigmore, Kerry Swann and the manager of Cleveland, Lew Redwood and Lawrence and Marie Higgins thank the editor, and Deer Industry New Zealand CEO MJ Loza, for the space given to farewelling Peter in the recent *Deer Industry News*.

To John Paterson, Errol Croad, Mark Acland and Peter Aitken: your words, stories and memories have given us all

a sense of pride in the achievement of the whole of the deer industry and Peter's vision, determination and effort.

I have had great pleasure in launching the Deer Industry's *Landcare Manual* and attending the 2004 conference; we all are particularly proud to have Peter's vision and commitment to sustainable deer farming and environmental care recognised in this fine publication.

Yours Sincerely
Fiona Elworthy
Craigmore

Paralisa test helps reveal true extent of JD infection in deer herds

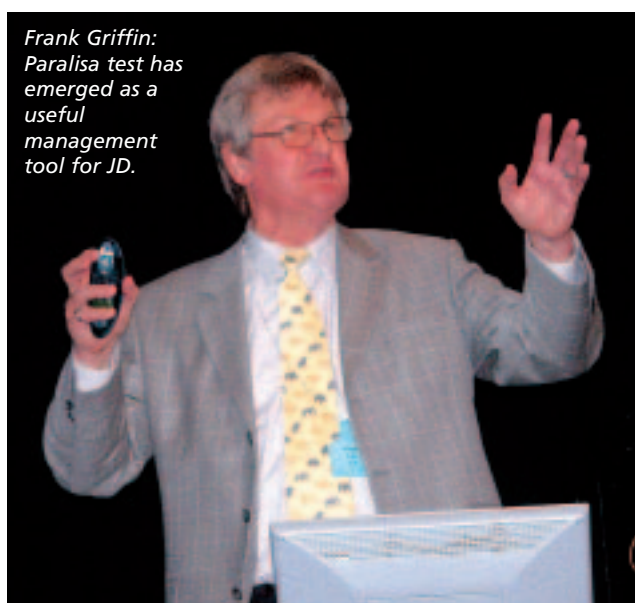
The Disease Research Laboratory's (DRL) Paralisa test for Johne's Disease (JD) in deer is helping farmers manage the problem much better, and clear some of the murk surrounding false-positive tests for bovine Tb that occur with Johne's-infected animals.

Speaking at the 2004 Deer Industry Conference in Wairakei last month, Professor Frank Griffin brought farmers up to date with the latest in JD diagnostics.

He reminded the audience that JD is a very new phenomenon in farmed New Zealand deer, with a known history of only 10 years. Deer are invariably infected with the cattle strain of the disease, although it is technically possible for them to be infected also with the sheep strain, he said. The impact of JD in deer may be far more serious than in cattle and sheep, with significant losses in younger animals

Post-mortem tissue culture is the best test for JD, but not much use when it comes to detecting cases in live animals, Griffin said.

The DRL's Paralisa test has emerged as a useful management tool, however. The test measures the presence of IgG1, an antibody specific to JD.



Frank Griffin: Paralisa test has emerged as a useful management tool for JD.

The test, as reported in Issue 35 of *Deer Notes*, costs \$20, including GST/head for up to 90 animals, reducing to \$10 + GST over that number.


In his written presentation, Griffin said the Paralisa test identifies apparently healthy animals with subclinical JD infections. A number of farmers have used whole-herd testing to aggressively manage JD, ranging from a stud with low disease prevalence to commercial herds suffering high losses. Some use it to verify that their herd is JD-free and to accredit stock for live sales.

A veterinarian quoted in Griffin's paper said the test was invaluable for reducing wastage in herds that had had a very high incidence of the disease. A bonus from the reduced incidence of JD was a reduction in the amount of ancillary testing for Tb as a result of non-specific reactions to the Tb skin test.

In one case study, a farmer with chronic JD losses over 4 years used a programme of three Paralisa tests over 18 months. By more accurately identifying infected animals, he was able to reduce infection rates in MA hinds from 38% to 2%, and in R1 hinds from 50% to 0.5%.

The same farmer had had a 90% reactor rate to the Tb skin test before this programme, rendering it useless. After the Paralisa testing programme and culling, the reactor rate dropped to 12%.

Griffin said that in a subgroup of Paralisa test positive animals, 30% had no lesions, but were culture positive for *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*. "This gives us confidence that the Paralisa test can detect infected animals with no evidence of clinical disease or scouring," he said. Culture results from testing of five herds indicated the Paralisa test has a sensitivity rate approaching 85% he added.

JD is not just an animal health problem, Griffin warned. It could also be a marketing problem given the potential for publicity about the unproven link between JD and Crohn's disease. 

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Prospects for a Johne's vaccine for deer

A series of AgResearch trials has so far failed to identify a vaccine that will satisfy three key criteria: effective protection against Johne's disease, avoidance of the cross-reactivity that can cause false-positives to Tb skin and blood tests, and market acceptability. However the work is continuing and the current trial is showing some promise. Colin Mackintosh, Veterinary Scientist, AgResearch Invermay, backgrounds the issues and describes the work so far.

Difficult diseases to eliminate or defend against

Johne's disease (JD) is caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*, an organism belonging to the group that includes human tuberculosis, bovine tuberculosis, avian tuberculosis and leprosy.

These are all slowly developing, chronic progressive diseases that are difficult to diagnose in the early stages and require prolonged antimicrobial therapy to treat them. They are also difficult to eliminate in situations where infection has become established in a population. Consequently there has been considerable effort aimed at trying to control these diseases. Vaccination is generally regarded as the best avenue.

But this family of bacteria have evolved a lifestyle that makes them difficult to vaccinate against. They all have the ability to invade and survive inside macrophages which are the cells that form the first line of defence against invading organisms. Because they live inside the body's cells it makes them substantially more difficult to attack than most of the other common disease-causing bacteria.

Intra-cellular parasites like Mycobacteria are generally protected from antibodies, which are the most well-known form of defence and which are the weapons most easily brought into play by vaccination. It requires a cell-mediated immune response (CMI) to get at bacteria inside cells. This is much harder to stimulate than the antibody response. It generally requires the use of live attenuated (weakened) vaccines and/or the use of very effective adjuvants (substances added to vaccines to stimulate the immune system).

BCG vaccine has been used for decades to prevent human tuberculosis. This is a live attenuated strain of *Mycobacterium bovis* and, although it gives a degree of protection to humans and animals against tuberculosis, its efficacy is variable and is quite poor in some circumstances. There have been a number of vaccines used around the world against Johne's disease in domestic livestock and most of these are based on an attenuated *M. paratuberculosis* Strain 316F, either as a live or a killed organism vaccine and an oil-based adjuvant. Vaccination is generally considered to be the most cost-effective means of controlling Johne's disease, especially in situations where it is highly prevalent.



Red weaners in the Johne's quarantine area at Invermay.

Commercial JD vaccines don't give total protection

Neoparasec™ vaccine (Merial NZ Ltd) was the first commercial Johne's vaccine marketed in New Zealand for use in sheep and goats (and cattle with MAF approval), but has been discontinued recently.

Since 2001, Gudair™ vaccine (CSL Animal Health) has been marketed for use in sheep and goats. Neoparasec is a live attenuated Strain 316F vaccine with a mineral oil adjuvant and Gudair is a killed Strain 316F vaccine with a similar mineral oil adjuvant.

Both vaccines have been shown to give significant protection against clinical Johne's disease, but neither completely protects against infection. In other words, vaccinated animals can still get a mild infection and can still carry the infection for some time, but are unlikely to suffer significant disease or show any signs of wasting or weight loss. Unfortunately, both vaccines have a tendency to cause pus filled lumps at the injection site in the neck, and can also cause a reaction in the local draining lymph node in the shoulder.

JD vaccination stimulates reactivity to Tb test

Because *M. paratuberculosis* is related to tuberculosis, vaccination with Strain 316F stimulates cross-reactive immune responses and sensitises animals to the tuberculosis test, which is why MAF approval was necessary before Neoparasec could be used in cattle. This is also the main reason why Gudair is not licensed for use in cattle.

Thus, while vaccination looks like a great prospect to protect deer against Johne's disease, it is also likely to have real problems. There is no point protecting them against Johne's disease by vaccination if they all have to be slaughtered as Tb test reactors.

Trials necessary

It has been necessary to conduct a series of trials in deer to find out if vaccination is feasible in deer: Does it protect them? Does it cause them to react to Tb tests and if so how could we either manage the situation or improve the vaccine and avoid the problem?

The other aspect that must be considered is the acceptability to the market of venison from vaccinated animals. As well as being safe for the animals, the vaccine must not leave unacceptable residues or cause excessive lesions at the injection site or in the draining lymph node. It may be necessary to earmark all vaccinated animals and subject them to extra meat inspection and trimming at slaughter, as occurs now

with Gudair-vaccinated sheep. Also, if JD becomes a market access issue, it will be necessary to differentiate between vaccinated and infected animals.

Since 2000, a number of trials involving vaccination of deer against Johne's have been undertaken at AgResearch Invermay. This work has been carried out in collaboration with Frank Griffin's Disease Research Laboratory at Otago University and Geoff de Lisle's Infectious Diseases Laboratory at AgResearch Wallaceville. It has also been supported by the Foundation for Research Science and Technology (FRST) and DEEResearch. Merial NZ Ltd and Agvax Developments/CSL Ltd have kindly supplied vaccines.

Trial 1: Neoparasec vaccine

The first trial, which used Red deer weaners, was to determine:

- if the Neoparasec vaccine was safe and caused injection site lesions
- the degree to which it causes cross-reactivity with the bovine tuberculin Tb skin test
- whether or not ancillary tests could clear false-positives.

This trial also compared a water-based Strain 316F vaccine (Aqueous Ptb – it is not a commercial vaccine) with the oil-adjuvanted Neoparasec.

Findings

- A single dose of Neoparasec caused moderate injection site reactions and produced a strong cross-reactive immune response, characterised by large skin test reactions at both the avian and bovine sites and high, persistent levels of bovine antibody in addition to avian antibody.
- The water-based vaccine, given as two doses six weeks apart, produced smaller transient injection site lesions, less cross-reactivity and little or no antibody production.

The cross-reactive response to Neoparasec would be likely to cause problems with routine Tb skin testing on commercial deer farms. Although the water-based vaccine caused some cross-reactivity to skin-testing, the minimal levels of bovine antibody would make ancillary testing easier.

Due to experimental constraints, this trial did not attempt to measure the efficacy of the vaccine against natural or experimental challenge with Johne's disease. However, the good cell-mediated immune response and the absence of antibody in deer vaccinated with the water-based vaccine were encouraging and suggestive of a protective response. Therefore, a second trial was conducted to test the efficacy of the water-based vaccine.

Trial 2: Efficacy of water-based vaccine

The objective of this trial was to test the efficacy of two doses of a water-based 316F vaccine to protect against experimental challenge with a high dose of virulent *M. paratuberculosis*.

In January 2002, a group of 83 young Red deer were randomly allocated to two groups. One group of 40 received two doses of an aqueous 316F vaccine by subcutaneous injection, 4 weeks apart in January and February, when

approximately 8 and 12 weeks old. The other group of 43 were unvaccinated controls.

They were all weaned in March and orally challenged daily for 4 days with a high dose of *M. paratuberculosis* organisms obtained from a field case of Johne's disease in a yearling red deer. The deer were monitored closely and any animals showing early signs of Johne's disease were euthanased. The healthy deer were slaughtered as they reached optimal slaughter weight.

The experimental infection model appeared to mimic natural outbreaks of clinical Johne's disease seen in young Red deer. The first case of clinical Johne's disease was diagnosed on 1 August, 20 weeks after challenge.

Findings

Over the seven months from August 2002 to February 2003 there were 16 clinical cases, 11 (26%) in unvaccinated controls and 5 (12.8%) in vaccinated animals. Although the aqueous vaccine gave some degree of protection, it was not enough to be of real practical benefit on deer farms.

Trial 3: Efficacy of Gudair vaccine and new lipid-adjuvanted vaccine


The objective of this trial is to test the efficacy of Gudair vaccine (killed 316F organisms with a mineral oil adjuvant) and a new live 316F vaccine (not a commercial vaccine) with a lipid adjuvant. This trial started in January 2004 when 90 young Red deer were randomly allocated to three equal groups of 30 and vaccinated with Gudair, Lipid 316F or nothing (control). They were all challenged with a high dose of virulent *M. paratuberculosis* as in Trial 2.

This trial is still underway and we anticipate getting the first clinical case of Johne's disease in the control animals in August/September.

Discussion

Neoparasec has now been withdrawn from the market and is therefore not available for use. However, it is highly unlikely that MAF would have granted permission for it to be used on commercial deer farms in New Zealand, except in certain circumstances. It would not have been able to be used in replacement stock in Tb-endemic areas because of the difficulty it may have caused with Tb diagnosis. However it may have been able to be used in non-endemic Tb areas where the comparative cervical test (CCT) could be used as a primary test, and in young deer destined for slaughter and only subject to works monitoring for Tb, rather than Tb testing.

It is quite likely that Gudair vaccine will experience similar difficulties with cross-reactivity with skin tests and blood tests for Tb, because both Gudair and Neoparasec use similar mineral oil adjuvants. The killed 316F organisms in Gudair are also just as likely to cause cross-reactive antibody production as the live 316F organisms in Neoparasec.

It is early days yet, but the new lipid adjuvant appears to stimulate little or no antibody and therefore it looks less likely to interfere with blood tests for Tb. It remains to be seen if either vaccine gives significant protection against clinical Johne's disease. 

Making pasture fit with deer's desire to put on condition

The challenge of matching pastures to the idiosyncratic nutritional requirements of deer came under the spotlight during the DEEResearch technical session held on the first morning of the 2004 Deer Industry Conference at Wairakei last month.

Landcorp groups pasture types

Simon Moloney, Forage Agronomist with Landcorp Farming, explained how the corporate farmer has developed three main groups of pasture types to match the needs of deer in the corporate's integrated breeding and finishing systems.

Much of this development has grown from the work of AgResearch scientists Warren Hunt and RJM Hay, who carefully documented the feeding preferences of different classes of deer in 1989-90. Their work quantified what most farmers see on their properties: deer show a strong preference for legumes and herbs over grasses. The systems have also been developed using knowledge gained from nutrition research at Massey University (see below).

Moloney said the predominantly ryegrass-based pastures in New Zealand do not suit lactating hinds' peak demand for yield during summer lactation. He noted for weaners, there is an acute demand for feed mass and quality in autumn and spring, with a flat period over winter.

Landcorp has met the challenge by developing three basic pasture mixes in blocks complemented by a fourth, smaller area devoted to winter forage crops.

Landcorp's Group I pasture for deer is grass based but with a strong clover and herb component. The pasture is designed for 7-10 years' duration and typically occupies about 45-50% of the area of a block. Brassica crops are used as a break when the pasture is replaced.

The species used depend on the local conditions. Moloney said choice of ryegrass cultivars should take heading date into account, as these are increasingly variable between cultivars, and have an important effect on timing of yields. Forage herbs like chicory are valued components, not only for their liveweight gain performance, but also mineral content and anthelmintic properties. He noted that deer unused to herbs can take a while to start grazing them.

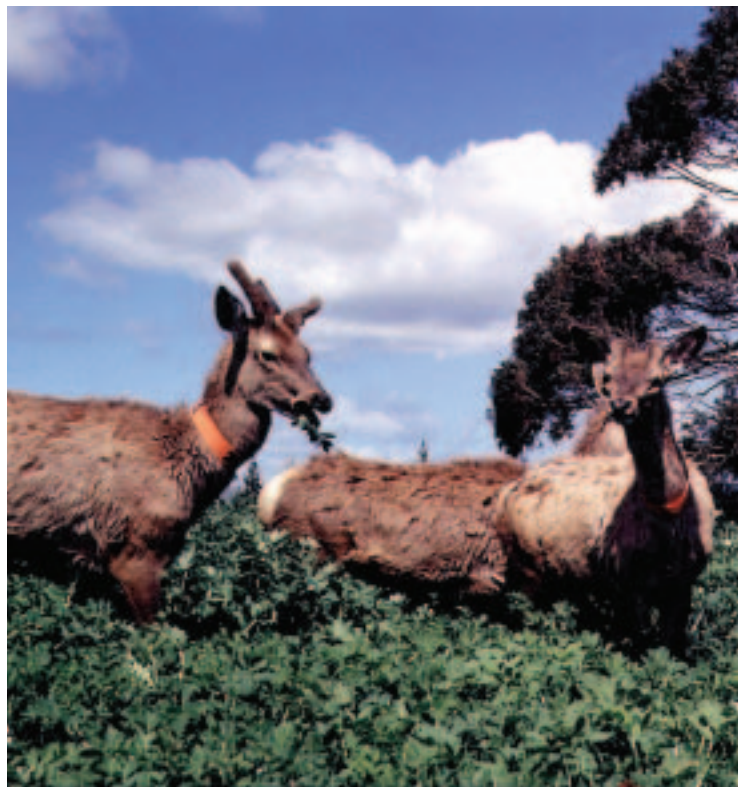
The Group II pastures developed by Landcorp combine the best features of annual and perennial ryegrasses: cool-season yield and high digestibility and persistence. The ryegrass hybrids used give pastures of 4-6 years' duration. Moloney said this group is particularly suited to finishing weaners. Again, clovers and herbs are important components. He recommended about 25% of land area be sown in Group II pastures.

Group III pastures involve the specialist forages: chicory, red clover, *lotus corniculatus* and lucerne, and could make up about 20% of the grazing area. "While winter dormant, these energy-dense swards offer concentrated yields for 8-9 months of the year and an important strategic nutritional role," Moloney said. "Typically they can help grow weaners quickly in the spring for early market premiums, and will enhance hind lactation and calf growth."

Because these forages are high in soluble carbohydrates compared to grasses, they result in much quicker rumination time and more efficient production. The condensed tannins in *lotus corniculatus* also improve protein absorption.



Simon Moloney: explained Landcorp's approach to pasture management in a combined breeding and finishing unit.



Deer enjoying a feed of sulla during Massey nutrition trials. Photo: Simone Hoskin, Massey University.

Weed control in these pastures can be challenging and expensive, Moloney admitted, especially for ragwort and nodding thistle which required a rotor wiper herbicide application.

Landcorp also allows a small Group IV grazing class to account for winter forage crops such as winter brassicas, and covering perhaps 10% of the grazing area.

In a combined breeding/finishing system, Landcorp rotates its MA hinds, weaners and R2 hinds through these four grazing groups, depending on seasonal and marketing requirements.

Understanding deer nutrition requirements essential

Dr Simone Hoskin, Lecturer in ruminant and equine nutrition at Massey University, took up Simon Moloney's theme on the seasonality of deer nutrition patterns.

She said nutrition needs to be tuned in to deer's intense urges for growth, eating and digesting food during longer days, followed by a maintenance-only requirement in winter when the urge is lost due to short daylength. This pattern reflects the evolution of our farmed deer species in harsh Northern Hemisphere environments where they coped with food shortages in winter followed by periods of relative plenty from late spring onwards.

It is important to understand the fundamental differences between deer nutrition and that of sheep and cattle, she said.

"Deer can digest faster, and aren't prone to bloat. But they don't digest fibrous material very well, which is important in late summer. They are more prone to mineral deficiency, but more tolerant of secondary compounds such as the high levels of condensed tannins that sheep and cattle won't eat."

She said deer like to browse as well as graze and will eat more frequently than sheep and cattle. They aren't partial to break feeding and, unlike some humans, stress will put them off their food.



Dr Simone Hoskin says nutrition must cater for the way deer have evolved.

Deer in Massey trials have shown a 14% growth advantage in the spring when grazing novel forages including chicory, red clover and sulla, compared with the best quality spring ryegrass pasture. The inference here is that pasture alone cannot match the nutrition needs of deer, she said. "Over the summer and autumn, the average growth advantage in Red deer with the novel forages including chicory, red clover, birdsfoot trefoil, sulla, and pasja was 30%, and with hybrid deer the results are even better," she said.

She noted that these averages cover a wide range of figures, both by forage type and by season, but that the same ryegrass pasture was used over a number of years as a control.

In addition to the growth rate advantages, the alternative forages and browse such as novel native plants offered a number of other benefits, Hoskin said. These included:

- reduced use of anthelmintics
- a natural trace element boost
- a more holistic management system with multi-purpose plants that will enhance the environment, animal performance and health
- reduced methane emissions with animals grazing chicory or plantain
- avoiding the "green desert" of grass-based pasture systems.

She said the secondary compounds in many of the herbs are anti-parasitic, and the taller growth habit of some herbs left less dead matter to host parasites during their larval stage. Like Simon Moloney, she noted that herb-based pastures require careful management. 🌱

Forage herb trial

There has been intense interest from deer farmers in the types of forage herbs used in Massey University's nutrition trials, reported in the May issue of *Deer Industry News*. The cultivars used were:

- "Grasslands Puna" chicory from Wrightson Seeds (more information on www.wrightson.co.nz under the knowhow section, or www.agritech.org.nz/wrightsonseeds.shtml)
- "Ceres Tonic" plantain from Pyne Gould Guinness

Heading date important with ryegrasses

Not all ryegrasses are the same, according to Cropmark Agronomist Andrew Ward, who explained to farmers at the DEEResearch technical session that for deer, a priority is later and better quality production with better 'bounceback'.

He said the varieties Matrix, Tolosa and Bronsyn gave superior dry matter production over a 12 month period in recent North Island trials.

For feed quality, he suggested later heading types with a high leaf: stem ratio were preferable. He said the later heading varieties allow better matching of peak feed demands, and provide improved quality and metabolisable energy into early summer.

With perennial ryegrasses, the range of maturity dates is now up to 45 days depending on variety.

Wound healing products from New Zealand deer velvet: Progress and prospects

By Jimmy Suttie, Dawn Clark and Mark O'Connor

Deer velvet is a very rapidly growing organ and is unique in that it is the only mammalian organ to be replaced entirely each year. With the aim of developing new products to match currently unmet needs, scientists and marketers are seeking the mechanisms which allow this process. This article briefly sets out progress, and describes work remaining and prospects for commercialisation.

Angiogenesis focus

Velvet Antler Research New Zealand (VARNZ) has chosen to work on the mechanisms which control small blood vessel growth (angiogenesis). This is because blood vessels must grow rapidly in order to supply the fast-growing and differentiating antler tissue. There are clear opportunities for products which can result from knowledge of these mechanisms.

Angiogenesis itself is a very broad field. VARNZ has chosen to focus its efforts on the development of products which can be used to promote wound healing. The current goal is to develop indications of efficacy for acute wounds and work toward the nirvana of healing chronic wounds, whose failure to heal is at least in part due to a reduced ability of blood vessels to grow into the wound area.

Market potential for wound healing products

Acute wounds range from cuts that use a sticking plaster to burns requiring hospital treatment. For example, burns are a major health burden with over a million cases a year in the United States alone, with 5% requiring hospital treatment.

Chronic wounds are conditions such as diabetic foot ulcers (the number of cases is growing at 7% per annum and should top 1.3 million cases in the United States by 2008) and venous leg ulcers, a problem of the ageing and obese. There are 500-700,000 cases in the United States per annum and numbers are growing.

Currently, there do not appear to be any easy answers to these conditions, particularly chronic wounds. Treatment is effectively cleaning the wound, keeping it clean and specialised wound dressings. Healing is slow, labour intensive and expensive.

Isolating factors promoting blood vessel growth

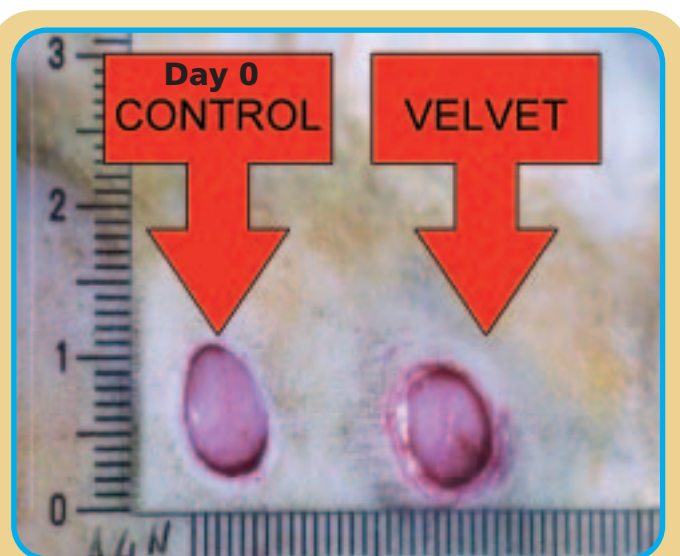
The idea is that small blood vessel growth is required to support the rapid growth of velvet. Small blood vessel growth is also required for effective wound healing. If the growth factors that encourage small blood vessel growth in velvet could be extracted, they may assist in the more rapid healing of wounds. Have you ever noticed how quickly the wound following button drop heals, or if the stag damages its antler, how quickly that heals?

Hence the research programme has sought to find the factors which promote blood vessel growth in deer velvet, extract them, formulate them for delivery and test them in *in vitro* (lab) and *in vivo* (live) models prior to clinical trialling in humans.

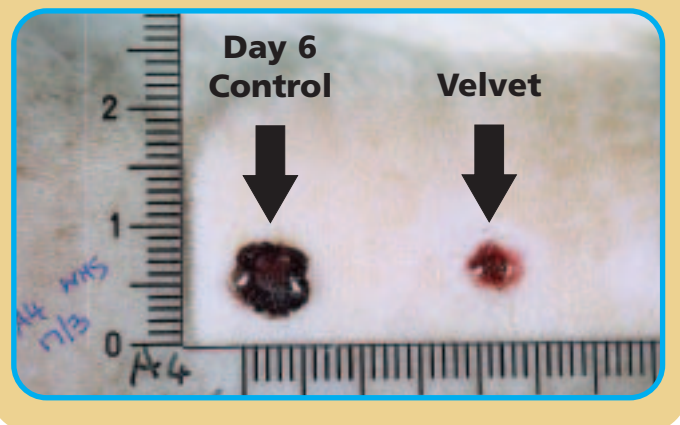
Progress

In general the thrust of the work is to develop a portfolio of Intellectual Property (IP), owned by the deer industry and AgResearch through VARNZ, that can be exploited for a suite of high value, effective, products.

The wound healing programme has been operating since 1998 but received a significant boost in 2002 when the Foundation for Research, Science and Technology (FRST) agreed to invest \$1.8 million per annum for four years for



Full skin puncture wounds at day 0 (above), and day 6 (below) with the deer velvet extract-treated wound on the right – showing a statistically significant and dramatic improvement.



the development of wound healing products from deer velvet. This term is halfway through and has recently been reviewed and re-mandated by FRST. The IP from this investment is owned by VARNZ and therefore 50% by the New Zealand deer industry.

VARNZ recognises that further partners will be needed to complete the commercialisation process. They bring advantages including market knowledge, distribution channels, a reputable brand and capital. The plan is to advance development as far as practical using existing resources. This creates the strongest selling proposition possible and maximises value of the IP for stakeholders before additional partners are brought on board.

Two major approaches have been used to find blood vessel growth factors in deer velvet.

1. The first is **bioactivity directed fractionation**. In this approach, a set of relevant bioassays for blood vessel growth are used to test the activity of fractions of extracts of deer velvet. This permits the development of progressively more potent extracts, until defined activity can be demonstrated. AgResearch has used this approach to develop such an extract which has repeatable, stable activity. VARNZ completed patents out on this extract and its use in March and May 2004, respectively. Over the last year, AgResearch has been conducting additional trials and developing a stable formulation to apply the extract topically to wounds. This work is now largely finished and the patents were completed on time in March and May, 2004.

However, efficacy on its own is not sufficient. The extract must also be able to be formulated into some sort of delivery mechanism (such as a cream, gel or spray) and it must be stable; that is, if it easily loses its activity, it will be difficult to use practically outside the laboratory. The extract has been trialled successfully in several different formulations and so far has been demonstrated to be very stable (it remained active following boiling).

In addition to IP protection, the novel extraction process makes replication of the extract very difficult.

Thus, the partners own protected IP, which gives VARNZ a strong position to source additional resources and commercial partners for the next phases leading to products.

2. The second approach involved **seeking genes which are selectively and highly expressed in deer velvet** and which potentially could promote blood vessel growth. Such genes can be expressed and the resultant proteins can be tested using specially developed bioassays. VARNZ can then choose to search for these proteins in extracts, to develop natural products, or continue to express the proteins to develop pharmaceutically active substances. This approach is proceeding satisfactorily.



Jimmy Suttie answering questions after his report to deer farmers at the Wairakei conference.

Prospects

VARNZ has taken advice on commercialisation strategies for wound healing products from deer velvet. A key decision is how the product will be regulated. It could be regulated in a number of different ways, but the two most likely are either as a natural product (easiest, but with no health claims possible and with a risk of low credibility) or as a medical device (requires some regulatory compliance, but less than a straight pharmaceutical, would allow some claims, and would allow 'over the counter' sales). Pending further advice, it is likely that VARNZ will opt for the medical device route.

Two key hurdles remain to be overcome before trials on humans can occur. Firstly, it is very important to show that the extract does not cause immune responses or sensitisation. These trials are currently being planned. Secondly, it must be demonstrated that the extract can be consistently produced

from batch to batch. This remains to be demonstrated.

Results will coincide with the search for commercial partners. Further development will depend on the strategies of the commercial partners and cannot be estimated here. This approach has been adopted to ensure the maximum commercial value is extracted from the existing investment in research and development which has taken place to date. It is vital that any product opportunity that we take to the marketplace is safe, stable, effective and that the IP is protected appropriately.

While shortcuts to a product might have been possible, this would not likely have led to the long-term sustainable benefits that we expect from this potential line of products. We have built the platform for a sustainable future, with scientific credibility, rather than develop a product of poorer quality with a high likelihood of succumbing to competition as a cheap commodity and never realising its potential value.

The future of a wound healing product derived from deer velvet being on the shelf, helping society, and returning value is a tantalising one. While, it is not a certainty, and there are possible stumbling blocks along the way, as we sit here today the future is looking bright and wide open. 🇳🇿

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Hoggets and deer run well together

Light stocking rates, minimising stress and leaving the animals to get on with the job have been part of the secret of Matt Holden's success in running in-lamb hoggets with Red breeding hinds on his Central Hawke's Bay property.

Holden outlined his programme for farmers at the DEEResearch technical morning at last month's Wairakei conference.

By sorting out stock management early on in the season, the Kelso composite (Finn, East Friesian, Texel over Romney base) lambs and hoggets and Red deer can be left with minimal interruption as the season progresses. Pasture is treated with a burst of nitrogen in August, the hoggets are scanned, pre-lamb shorn and treated with Maximizer, before going into the deer paddocks, while the hinds are settled early to get their pecking order sorted out.



Hinds and fawns on Matt Holden's Hawke's Bay property.

There are few animal health problems. The sheep and deer do not cross-contaminate each other with worm larvae, and Holden said the risk of Johne's disease is lower than it would be running the deer with cattle – and with sheep there is no risk of the introduction of Tb.

“There is a small risk of exposure to MCF, but we have had no problems to date,” he said. “MCF is partly triggered by stress, and that is one reason we try to keep stress levels down. The Johne's risk is lower with sheep than it is with cattle, and with young sheep it is lower still.”

He said the grazing combination ensures ragwort is well controlled, but more importantly, the returns add up. The breeding hinds are currently returning \$646/hectare while the hoggets return a further \$354, adding up to a neat \$1000 per hectare. The hoggets are contributing 35% of the gross income from the deer unit in 110 days. And the sheep that lamb as hoggets go on to scan 200% as 2-tooths.

The result, Holden said, is a productive, low-stress system, good pasture and weed control, good returns and a contented farmer.



Matt Holden: has developed a low-stress system with good returns.

The hinds are set stocked at 6-8 hinds/hectare from mid September and the hoggets at 4-6 hoggets/hectare from later in the month. Docking is done early, paddock by paddock, with a pour-on for fly control given to both hogget and lamb.

Holden said the hoggets lamb quite happily with the deer in the paddock. They are removed at the beginning of January for weaning, with cattle brought in only if required for pasture control in late January-early February.

WRIGHTSON LIVESTOCK MARKET REPORT

		North Island (\$/kg)	South Island (\$/kg)
Weaner Hybrid Stags	Top	2.20	2.30
	Medium	1.80	2.00
	Small Med	1.40	1.30
Weaner Red Stags	Top	1.90	2.10
	Medium	1.70	1.70
	Small Med	1.20	1.00
Weaner Hybrid Hinds	Top	1.80	2.00
	Medium	1.50	1.70
	Small Med	1.10	1.00
		North Island (\$/hd)	South Island (\$/hd)
Rising 2yr Stags Velvet	Medium	300	270
Rising 2yr Hinds Hybrid	Top	250	270
	Medium	200	230
Rising 2yr Hinds Red	Top	220	270
	Medium	170	200
	Smaller	120	100
Mixed Age Stags Velvet	Top	450	500
	Medium	400	400
Mixed Age Hinds Red	Top	240	275
	Medium	190	210
	Smaller	160	150

Seasonal Comments:

The live market for breeding hinds is now on the increase, as are the schedules for both Cervena and mixed age. It was disturbing to see some good lines of hinds sent for slaughter during the autumn.