

Deer Industry News

Case study farm.
Netherdale and
Laird Partnership

Conference Preview
ADVENTURER TO HELP
INSPIRE CHANGE
KEYNOTES CONFIRMED
AND THERE'S RUGBY!

Venison's Story
LOW IN FATS, HIGH
IN PROTEIN, VITAMINS
AND MINERALS –
WHAT'S NOT TO LIKE?

Auditing your FEP
ENVIRONMENT PLAN AUDIT
GETS A RUN-THROUGH IN
CANTERBURY – A POSITIVE
EXPERIENCE FOR ALL

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Deer Industry News

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Cover: Velvetting stags at the Laird family's Netherdale block on a paddock of chicory. See page 10 for the first of our farm case study reports. Photo: Lindsay Keats.

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Finding opportunities in welfare challenges



Kate Littin.

IT'S 20 YEARS since New Zealand took a step forward for animal welfare and introduced the Animal Welfare Act 1999. The deer industry, recognising the importance of paying attention to animal welfare in order to manage a sensitive animal and to reach markets, developed the first code of welfare for a pastorally farmed species to be issued under the new Act. That milestone holds special personal value for me too, because it was the first job I was given as technical adviser starting in the former MAF.

The first major review of the Act culminated in 2015. Two key changes were the introduction of regulations with direct penalties to address low-to-medium level offending and, at the other end of the spectrum, the explicit recognition of sentience. This encourages acknowledgement of positive states of welfare – not just negative – and the consideration of positive welfare in the development of standards.

The review also led to the release of a national strategy for animal welfare, “Animal Welfare Matters”. The strategy is intended for all those involved – it’s not just a government document. The two key outcomes, better care of animals and reputation for integrity, are both important for progress in animal welfare in New Zealand.

Also, since the Animal Welfare Act came into existence we’ve seen significant progress in scientific understanding: we better understand how people view animals, how they decide what is acceptable practice and what isn’t, and how this translates to consumer behaviour. We better understand the impacts of farming practices on animals and how animals experience the world around them. We also better understand the human–animal relationship and its impacts on production and animal wellbeing – positive and negative.

So where to next? New trends are emerging and the more perceptive operators in the deer industry should already be able to see advantages in responding positively to these. One, the expectation that animals should be able to live a good life and not just a life that avoids unnecessary pain and distress, is a global change that is already being addressed in different ways in New Zealand. It is a stated intention of the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee that positive welfare will be addressed in minimum standards as codes are reviewed. Currently only a few codes have standards around positive welfare.

Another obvious trend is the call for proof that standards are being met – it is not enough simply to have appropriate standards in place. At its extreme, this leads to calls for CCTV on farm and at slaughter. A move that might help with this is better reporting on what we actually do with animals in New Zealand, to fill in gaps in understanding with evidence rather than stories being told through media campaigns.

A third interesting trend is a move to introduce animal welfare into global conversations about environmental sustainability, whether explicitly through the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals or more generally through the introduction of One Welfare/One Health as a holistic concept to support change. We need a New Zealand solution that supports farmers and producers to meet obligations and expectations across animal, human/community and environmental safety and wellbeing. This is particularly so with growing limitations on resource use and management and the reality of climate change.

The New Zealand deer sector has a history of being proactive on animal welfare issues. This should serve you well as you respond to these ongoing changes in knowledge and expectations. ■

– Dr Kate Littin, Manager Animal Welfare Team, Ministry for Primary Industries

What happens when your environment plan is audited?

by Phil Stewart, *Deer Industry News* Editor

Mentioning the words “audit” and “regional council” in the same breath is likely to provoke eye-rolling and elevated blood pressure amongst some farmers. But deer farmer Stu Stokes recently hosted not one, but seven auditors at his mid-Canterbury property and found that, on the contrary, it was actually a positive experience.



From left: Jeska McHugh (ECan Senior Environmental Initiative Adviser), Ian Brown (ECan Principal Land Management Adviser), Stu Stokes, Janet Gregory (NZ Landcare Trust) and Sylvia McAslan, ECan Land Management Adviser, Selwyn Waihora).

STOKES HAS COMPLETED a Farm Environment Plan (FEP) using the Beef+Lamb template and is on the way to applying for a farming consent. Having an interesting property with various environmental challenges, he could provide an ideal setting for Environment Canterbury (ECan) to run a mock audit of the plan in a real-life situation.

Led by ECan Principal Land Management Adviser Ian Brown, the seven auditors visited Stokes’ Riverslea farm at Sheffield on 18 March. Janet Gregory of NZ Landcare Trust, who attended the mock audit day, then led a well-attended field day for local deer farmers on 4 April, where they got a first-hand look at the audit process and the pertinent issues on Stokes’ farm. (Silver Fern Farms’ Rusty Andrews was also in attendance with the trusty BBQ trailer to provide a welcome feed and refreshments at the end of proceedings.)

The discussion on the day helped demystify the process of putting together a Farm Environment Plan and the subsequent consenting and audit process (where required – not all Canterbury farms will need one). There was plenty of good advice forthcoming on ways to make the whole process easier.

ECan’s Ian Brown said the comments and gradings given by the seven auditors were quite consistent, which was a good sign.

The Farm Environment Plan

Stokes’ FEP begins with a series of farm maps and resource chart that breaks the farm into land management units (LMUs) – areas or resources with similar characteristics (topography, land use, soils and so on) – and spells out the environmental strengths and weaknesses for each. The LMUs include watercourses and mahinga kai (the value of natural resources that sustain life and provide food).

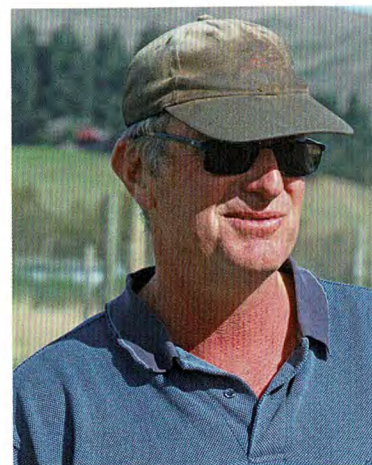
It then spells out a series of high-level environmental objectives for management areas such as nutrient and soil management, documenting the practices being used to help achieve these. And most importantly it asks how you can demonstrate that you are doing what you say you are (e.g. stock records, correspondence, photos).

Finally it lists additional actions or targets needed to achieve those overall objectives, using good management practices, putting a timeframe and priority level around them. Once listed out like this, these actions – e.g. getting an Overseer® report done or changing from cultivation to direct drilling – can be fed into the farm’s annual work plan and budget.

The Deer Industry Environmental Management Code of Practice is an excellent resource for helping flesh out an FEP.

Wait! There’s more: Plan Change 5

ECan has recently released a Plan Change 5 addendum for farmers using the Beef+Lamb FEP workbook, which teases out some additional information and actions. While it could be seen to add to the work burden, the addendum also provides scope for extra detail that gives the environmental plan more meaning, with more specific actions, such as dealing with a critical source area, that can be fed into a farm’s annual



Stu Stokes: Found the mock audit a positive experience in the lead-up to applying for a resource consent.

plan. For example, in Stokes' case, using a bucket test to check the performance of irrigation equipment, and use of soil moisture monitoring were added under the irrigation management area.

How the audit works: document everything!

The FEP audit is an on-farm assessment of how well a farm is progressing towards meeting its environmental objectives. In Canterbury they cost \$1000–\$2000 and the auditors are independent of ECan. (There are currently 24 certified auditors.)

Ian Brown stressed that the important thing is not so much how close you are to your goals – it's more about what you're doing to get there and whether you're trending in the right direction.

There are four overall grades possible in an audit: A, B, C and D. The mock audit at Stokes' farm gave a B grade, a pass mark that acknowledges there is still work to be done on good management practices, but that progress is being made towards addressing the issues. A result of C or D would be a "fail" and would trigger more intensive follow-up. Brown said one of the main differences between a B and C grade is the degree of planning evident to address identified issues. With a B grade there is evidence that plans are in place. For a C grade there is no evidence of plans in place.

Achieving an A grade on audit will mean a three-year gap before the next audit. This is reduced to 2 years for a B grade, 1 year for a C grade and 6 months for a D.

A result of C or D would be first a visit from a regional council land management adviser and, following a second fail grade after another audit, a compliance visit from a regional council resource management officer, and the building of support from industry organisations working with a regional council panel and others to help a farm get over the line.

The audit goes through all of the management areas listed in the FEP, and lists reasons to support an assessment and against an assessment. Often the reasons against are simply that work wasn't documented or hasn't begun. There's also a qualitative assessment applied, where the auditors state their level of confidence in their assessment (low, medium or high). This reflects the amount of evidence in front of them that an objective (e.g. a change in fertiliser application practices) has actually been met. Saying "just trust me on this" generally won't cut the mustard – you need proof. If the auditors' confidence level that objectives are being met is high across all areas, a farm would qualify for an A grading.

One important point about the whole audit process came up repeatedly during the day: document, document, document! Both Brown and Stokes emphasised that it's important to keep all records that help show the auditor what's been happening on the farm. "The evidence needed to support an evaluation needs to be more compelling than a nice morning tea," Brown said.

Evidence used could be as simple as a receipt from a recycler for chemical drums you'd handed in, or photos taken through the year showing physical changes or progress on work. Stokes said a simple example was when he left a hollow alone during spraying out of a paddock. "That wouldn't have been so obvious later when the auditors came, but I could show what happened at the time with a photo taken on my phone."

Brown said the auditors rely on a combination of this

documentary evidence and what they see in the field, plus discussions with the farmer about their farm system and its interactions with the environment. Each process (paperwork and farm inspection) typically takes 1–2 hours, although the farmer will need to do some preparation to have all the relevant records on hand.

Stokes said having a positive attitude and taking ownership of your environmental issues with a plan to address them was a big part of a successful audit process. The other main part was the good documentation.

Consenting

The trigger levels for needing a land use consent vary depending where you are in the region. Brown said most farming operations, particularly those with irrigation, will need a land use consent, "but if you are not sure, give Environment Canterbury a call".

The average cost for consents paid up front will be \$2350, although this will be adjusted up or down in individual cases once the consent is completed. In Canterbury, once an FEP and Overseer nutrient budget for a property are approved and a consent has been applied for, the audits will begin for real within 12 months of the consent being granted.

Farm profile

Riverslea Enterprise Ltd is a family-owned business run by Stu and Julie Stokes at Sheffield, near the Canterbury foothills. It came into the family in 1987 and Stu and Julie moved there in 2003. Various stock classes have been tried over the years, including sheep and dairy grazers, but the enterprise has now settled down to mainly deer (velvet and venison) with some beef cows and cereal cropping.

Home block:

- 233ha (204 eff); flat; includes 74ha centre pivot irrigated, river terraces and dryland
- permanent river (Hawkins), ephemeral streams, water races, spring-fed streams and ponds
- pasture, lucerne (some with plantain and grasses), fodder beet, swedes and cereals (barley).

Run block:

- 140ha (130 eff); rolling
- very wet in winter
- includes small forestry block, two ephemeral streams and several critical source areas
- stock water from county scheme.

General:

- Six soil types over both blocks ranging from silt loams to heavy clays and iron pan
- 900mm/year rainfall falling out of summer safe and tending summer dry.

Livestock:

- Hinds: 1338 (MA 595, R2 318, R1 425)
- Stags: 665 (R2 230, R1 425)
- Beef cows: 102 MA.

Labour:

- One worker for 6 weeks in summer, otherwise self sufficient; use of contractors minimal.

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Environment day: continued



Stags on the Riverslea home block.

General observations

Stu Stokes had a number of observations on environmental matters during the field day:

- Other than for straight pasture or lucerne, Overseer is a difficult tool to use, for example with cropping or with lucerne when it's grown in a mix with plantain and grasses.
- Everything possible is recycled on the farm: twine, baleage wrap and chemical drums.
- Hinds are run on fodder beet and swedes in winter, supplemented with plenty of barley straw to keep them full. Stu does not like tight breaks in crops over winter ("controlled starvation" in his view). He gives generous space and moves breaks about once in five days. Stu notes that deer prefer to rest up in flat areas with no crop, where they feel more secure.
- After hinds come off crop in about September, they are moved to the run block for set stocking. Weaning is as early as practical in late February and some barley is fed from January on if needed. Hinds come back to the home block in June.
- Wallows are recognised as an animal welfare necessity; Stu fills them with stone where they are likely to connect with



This spring-fed waterway on the home block feeds into a large pond, and has been well protected from livestock.

- waterways, but otherwise not.
- Fence pacing is only a problem where deer are underfed and is not an issue of note at Riverslea.
- If you are having to deal with sediment from an upstream neighbour, "you need to have a conversation". If all else fails, a sediment trap to deal with the outflow should be as close to the boundary as practicable.
- Weed control along fenced-off waterways is an ongoing problem. Sheep can be used in some cases but they are prone to falling in and drowning (there are no sheep at Riverslea).
- District councils sometimes have funding available to help preserve native vegetation remnants.
- The ephemeral streams on the run block are problematic and may need fencing off. This could exclude deer from the shade and shelter provided by willows, which would need to be provided another way.
- It may be necessary to build a sediment trap for the run block, which could be a major investment.
- A good farm map is essential for your FEP and eventually getting a consent and being audited. It needs to tie in with fertiliser contractor's system so applications can be accurately recorded.

A valuable day

Local deer farmers attending the field day were fully engaged and had plenty of questions for Janet Gregory, Stu Stokes, Phil McKenzie (DINZ) and the three ECan staff in attendance.

Lindsay Hills, who farms at Mount Thomas, said the field day gave him the confidence to progress with his FEP and especially valuable was advice that he could build a sediment trap below a block of trees that has a stream running through it. "I was worrying about how I could deal with the sediment coming out of those trees and this advice has shown me what I can do."

Locals Mike Smith and Stu Baxter both said the day had made them feel a lot more positive about pushing ahead with their FEPs. "It was good to see things explained in practical terms and see the different risks and hazards on another farm that's going through the same process," Baxter said.

Phil McKenzie, who is working part time with the P2P Programme setting up Deer Industry Environment Groups (DIEG) said there was strong interest from attendees and as a result of the day there had been enough interest to form another Canterbury group. Members of DIEGs join with the aim of developing an FEP for their property. "It is a DINZ and DFA objective that all New Zealand deer farms have an approved FEP by 2020, so this initiative by the branch to get more farmers into environment groups, learning about good management practices and preparing and implementing FEPs is great to see," McKenzie said. ■



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