

OCTOBER 2021

MARLOW GENETICS



THE SEASON

It hasn't been the easiest year; in fact, I've found it one of the toughest in my 40-year farming career.

I managed the previous year's drought reasonably well, had that amazing recovery through July and August, had my fourth-best lambing ever (165% ewes to the ram), got all the stock through to the end of the year in good nick, and they were well sold. The 2th rams you bought were the best I've ever presented despite being average throughout the autumn.

June had been the only month above-average rainfall and then the 150mm in November grew a massive amount of feed for the summer. I had destocked so this became a double-edged sword. The ewes tugged well but the subsequent poor feed quality and little quantity, worm challenges, and maybe some other factors meant most classes of stock struggled through this winter. Low covers, a modest nitrogen response not because of low temperatures but lack of moisture during the winter for goodness' sake required further destocking.

However, as you likely know, late September finally delivered with 90mm of rain and covers have responded accordingly and the clover content is fantastic.

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I imagine this is because of the lack of grass competition, the warmer winter temperatures, and that none of the autumn-applied sulphur, potassium and phosphate had been used or even gone anywhere.

Unless the last two months of this year bring weather events, this will be the third year in a row where only two months of the 12 have been above my long-term monthly average. Explains to some extent why pastoral farming hasn't been easy lately.

The ewes were plain at docking, but I was surprised the lambs were as good as they were. I think we have these sheep's genetics that we share where they are programmed to milk to the best of their ability no matter the cost. Have you ever seen a fat dairy cow in September? And those farmers pile the supplements into their girls.

But I've finally come out the other side in October with good feed levels with high quality and greatly improved stock. The ewes and lambs are piling on the weight, bulls likewise and the ewe and stud ram hoggets look great.



THE BIGGER PICTURE

This continues to be dominated by Covid-19 and in particular, the new variant Delta which is more infectious and moves faster than previous variants. This is what this country is seeing now as the system struggles to keep on top of this outbreak and our elimination policy has now run its course as we move into containment. I mention it here because it may affect how we farm and operate in the months ahead as we transition to a world where we learn to live and die, with the virus as the rest of the world is doing. It is quite possible this time might be around ram selling time. We will cross that bridge if we come to it but I'm sure we will be able to undertake the task contactless if need be. Time will tell.

SHEEP IMPROVEMENT LTD (SIL) AND RECORDING NEWS

Marlow (712) continues to have some of the highest figures in the country for maternal genetics given its modest size of 300 stud ewes. For example, if you go to the new tool developed, nProve (<https://nprove.nz/#/home>), and look up breeder results, you will see the stud is in the top three for the past four cohort years.

The MW+M indexes of the rams you purchase are in the top few % of rams available for sale throughout the country and often better than many other stud rams used elsewhere. These indexes are of course a measure of the potential productivity of these genetics but to express that potential need to be well managed and well-fed. A fitting example of not getting something for nothing.

I've heard from a couple of you who did do exactly that and despite being in tough areas beset with drought with the strategic use of supplementary feeds achieved lambing in excess of genuine 170% ewes to the ram and lambs growing like billyo. Others have told me they also had record lambings given the excellent lambing weather and will be well pleased with those September rains.

The high indexes are surprising as my focus in recent years has been more on structure, conformation, and the FE tolerance programme. I'm prepared to trade off some of these excessive SIL figures for a new initiative which I'll tell you about next.



BREEDING FOR WORM RESISTANCE

Vet Services are reporting a sudden increase in resistance in clients' flocks by worms to triple drenches. This is also in flocks with good known status from previous Faecal Egg Count Reduction Tests that have been sticking to the recommendations to avoid resistance. One of their theories is that with these concurrent droughts, drenched lambs have been going onto pastures cooked by the sun with no resident drench-susceptible worm populations and the few worms surviving the drench shed their eggs and the resulting progeny have only each other to breed with thus increasing the rate of resistance.

Realising increasing failure of drenches is a given, I've begun to use rams from studs that have been breeding for worm resistance for some years. Breeding for resistance appears to be the way to go instead of the less pursued breeding for resilience. These studs are also doing the facial eczema work and are FE Gold as well, so I'm making sure I don't lose ground on this important facet of my breeding programme. This season I'll be using Techion's PhenR service which provides farmers with valuable data that allows ranking and selection of breeding animals within and across mobs that are naturally resistant to parasites.

It means I'll let the stud lambs get decently wormy and then individually sample them and the spread of FEC results informs the selection

lists and allows selecting the best for breeding and culling the worst.

You will see a new column on the selection sheets, DPF (Dual Purpose FEC), which, just like DPX and the other sub index, allows you to weigh up the traits important to your own breeding programme.

Resistance to internal parasites is moderately heritable at 30%. Because I'm prepared to use outside genetics and am targeting highly worm resistant rams, I can make rapid progress in this trait that will benefit both Marlow and consequently your own flocks for this trait.

But the cost is likely to shift down from the high genetic levels as talked about above given these other studs are a little below Marlow. I believe this is a small price to pay in the pursuit of long-term sustainability. The fertility and growth rates built into our sheep flock's genetics are so high that even a breeding programme designed to drive them lower would take many years to make much difference.

Less drenching will save money, time, and increase the effectiveness of the drenches still working on your farms as the best way to prevent anthelmintic resistance is to breed animals that do not need drenching. Other benefits will be an improvement in supply chain integrity and an improved offering for consumers with a lessened reliance on chemicals, which is where the processors and exporters want us to move to.





THE 2TH RAMS

The 2th rams have recovered well from the drought and look good.

They are a bit later shorn given I broke my collarbone the day before getting them into shear so that went on the back burner until I was able to supervise the fleece weighing operation. Yes, I'm still doing that! Wool is going to slowly come right; I feel it in my bones including my clavicle.

They have been muscle scanned, weighed several times and their dam's current lambing data is about to be entered into SIL.

All sired by rams who passed Ramguard at .6 and all their dams and many grand dams also sired by rams who passed at this level. It's the assurance that many now claiming to have FE tolerant rams for sale just can't provide.

Remember, any referral that results in a new client gets you a decent deduction off this year's account.

Forward this onto your farming mates who might like to improve their flock's performance.

Email me back with an indication of your ram requirements please and I'll chase others up with a call in a week or two.

Ram selling will be in December as usual. Keep an eye on www.facebook.com/Marlowgenetics for more pictures through the season. Thank you for your ongoing support of the stud; it's much appreciated.

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