

MARLOW GENETICS



THE SEASON

I see I started last year's newsletter by saying that it hadn't been the easiest year as we came out of two concurrent autumn/winter droughts. Well, 2022 hasn't been any easier although for completely different reasons.

Last year's drought finally broke and then the heavy rains earlier this year in late summer and early autumn rectified the moisture deficit in the ground and grew an enormous amount of feed. I'd never seen grass grow so rapidly and quickly lost control of the quality.

I wondered if I'd ever be able to clean it up in time for lambing and the spring when quality is key. Turned out it wasn't going to be a problem. As everyone reading this knows, we have just come out of an exceedingly wet winter.

I know some of you have experienced a lot of slipping and infrastructure damage which is tough. Six hundred mm of rain fell from May through September with the latter month delivering 200mm. These are heavy clays over pans, so the cattle have made a mess and the sheep have been miserable. The mildness means lambing hasn't been a disaster but disappointing after a good scanning. The constant wet and lack of sun has been hampering lamb growth rates.

Last July I had a fertiliser truck spinning nitrogen on

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in the middle of the month after it finally rained. This July, it was impossible to get the two-wheel motorbike around.

I've heard reports of helicopter retrievals of side by sides, and I sold some store two-year-old bulls in October because it was so wet and little feed at a time I'm usually fretting about not having enough on to control the spring flush. However, the farm has dried out and the spring has kicked well into gear.

Above: Works terminal lambs at weaning.

Below: Some of this year's two-tooth rams.



If a ewe is determined to have triplets, at least have three good ones. There is 16kg of birth weight here (plus at least 10kg of amniotic fluids and placenta). The ewe must have been relieved to finally lamb.



SHEEP IMPROVEMENT LTD (SIL) AND WOOL

There have been a number of changes in the national sheep recording scheme since last year. The main one you might notice is that they have decided to remove wool from the index and so it no longer shows up as one of the sub-indexes. Not a surprise but sad that the woes of the wool industry have come to this. It's not a trait I've paid any notice of for some years for selection purposes and I don't think any clients have either. I asked my SIL advisor if that meant I didn't need to weigh the ram and ewe hogget fleeces and they said not to trouble myself. So, after this stud doing it for 50 years religiously, it wasn't done this year which felt odd. I'll continue to select for wool quality and cull any black spots and fibres but it's the end of an era.

The good news is that it makes room on the selection sheets which will be taken up by FEC (faecal egg count). Widespread and rapid drench resistance to triples is being reported so this health trait is very important. I've already been using rams from studs selecting for this health trait and early this year I let the ram and ewe stud lambs get very wormy and then sampled individually 450 of them. The samples are sent down to Invermay and eggs counted to inform the FEC index. The range was surprisingly large going from 50 to 5000 epg. Makes the opportunity to select from the best ones easy. Being moderately heritable at 30% and my use of outside rams with very high FEC figures, we will make good progress on this trait. If you look at the genetic trend lines that are attached or else on the Marlow web site, you can see good progress since 2013 and Marlow's advancement is well ahead of the industry average.

JUST MUSING

I had a pleasant note from a ram client who is in his mid-sixties and had an offer to lease his farm he couldn't resist. Graham wrote, "Just wanted to sign off with a thank you for the generous way you embraced a relative sheep genetics rookie six years ago (okay I know it's your business and you had rams to sell but you always did it with unfailing charm and wit and a great lunch). In somewhat modest return I have always sung the praises of the Marlow rams and the significant improvement they have made to my sheep to anyone who will listen. The only negative comments I've had in return are the unprintable views of Lynda on the topic of Marlow fertility as we head out in the dark to give a third feed to the twenty-seven bottle fed lambs this winter."

I've heard from several of you that despite the persistent rain, you've had record or near record lambing %'s, some even into the 160's so well done.

Ram selling is a relationships business and I've always enjoyed my interactions with clients. One client has been coming every year for all forty that I've been here and many of you have turned up for twenty to thirty years. Others have arrived over the last couple of years. Your business is much appreciated.



THE 2TH RAMS

They were palpated recently, and the sires palpated and bled for the annual brucellosis accreditation which they passed. Seven top ones with particularly good FEC figures have just undergone the ordeal of the Ramguard FE test and I wait anxiously for day twenty-one when we will blood them again to see if there are any reactors. There is one in the group who I used as a ram hogget who is outstanding but I'm trying not to get my hopes up as I might well be crushed if he fails the FE test. Time will tell.

FE resistance continues to be an important trait built into these genetics we share and proves its value on a regular basis.

The sale rams are looking good despite living in my wettest paddocks through the winter as neither cattle nor ewes would have wanted to be there. They haven't been drenched since the end of May although I was tempted to drench them during September as their worm counts were getting up. But I held my nerve, and their natural immunity appears to have kicked in despite the worm challenge. They'll get their drench when I quarantine them off farm at sale with one of the new actives as usual.

If you haven't visited our Facebook page yet, www.facebook.com/Marlowgenetics please have a browse as there is plenty of information there about what we are up to. It's not my natural place but my daughter-in-law Rosa tells me I have to do it, and of course, I do everything now I'm told.

I will be in touch during December to arrange a day for a visit.

Steve & Jane



*2015-born ewe
with 5kg lambs*

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MARLOW
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