



## CASE STUDY

# Tom, Anne and Tim Costello

### At a glance

Tom, Anne and Tim Costello

Location: The Grange, Hawarden, North Canterbury  
2800 Wairere Romney ewes, 700 hoggets, Friesian bulls, 150 rising two-year-old and 150 rising one-year-old RapID tag

### Challenges

- Monitoring weight gain between before weaning between lambs that were tailed and those that weren't.
- Extra work associated with recording information.

### Benefits

- Helps monitor the performance of the ewe flock including ewes with twins and singles.
- Easy to draft out hoggets that aren't in lamb.
- RadID tag is quite robust with low loss rate.

**"Using EID tags assists as a management tool in the sheep flock without creating more work" says North Canterbury sheep and beef farmer Tom Costello.**

Tom and his son Tim Costello, who farm The Grange, near Hawarden, have their entire sheep flock EID tagged. While Tom admits he doesn't do a lot with the data, having the flock EID tagged has some handy uses. As well as 2800 Wairere Romney ewes and 700 hogget replacements, The Grange also runs Friesian bulls until two years old and about 360kg carcass weight.

These arrive at the farm at a range of ages, with some reared by the Costellos as four-day-old calves, and others bought as weaned calves and yearlings. The Costellos started EID tagging their young sheep as part of the Farm IQ pilot programme. "That continued for about five years, so most of our sheep were EID tagged while we were in that programme." While the tags were free during the pilot scheme, the Costellos continued with them once it finished, despite the added cost. Tom says the tags allow him to monitor the performance of his ewe flock. "We retain a file of the sheep that have twins and singles. It does give us the ability to auto-draft those sheep off." "We record any ewe hoggets that are dry, so it is easy to identify them if they are dry again." When putting the hoggets through the Racewell scales,



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he can programme it to draft off those that aren't in-lamb, so these can be put on different feed. This can be done without having to mark ewes with raddle.

About 80 per cent of ewe hoggets have a lamb. While in the Farm IQ pilot, the Costellos did a couple of small trials. One was to determine whether there was any difference in weight gain before weaning between lambs that were tailed and those that weren't. When tailing a pen of lambs, the last 20 were left untailed and their tag number recorded. "It turned out there was no difference in weight gain." It was also useful to have a few EID tags in lambs being finished, to monitor the weight gain of this sample group and how well they were doing. The weigh indicator gives an instant weight gain when it picks up a tag that has been through at an earlier date. "Where it is useful is the things that you can do without creating more work. "We don't want to get into a lot of extra work trying to record stuff, so we are just doing stuff that is easy," Tom says. The fold-around Allflex RapID tag also seemed quite robust, with a low loss rate. At The Grange, sheep are run year round on pasture, with little supplementary feeding, apart from grain feeding during any drought period. On the farm's light country, feed quality was

boosted by an established seed bank of subterranean clover, as well as some lucerne.

Cattle were farmed on the heavier ground and wintered on crops. "We run a proportion of cattle as they are less work than sheep. I'd run more cattle, but we are probably too dry." While annual rainfall averaged 700mm, in recent years it had been only around 600mm. The Grange was looking at adding 150ha of irrigation, potentially next spring, as part of a revised Hurunui Irrigation Scheme now operated by the Amuri Irrigation Company (AIC). The proposed piped scheme will irrigate about 4000ha around Hawarden and Waikari. The AIC, which irrigates more than 28,000ha of land in the Amuri basin around Culverden purchased the Hurunui Water Project's resource consents in 2018, after an earlier proposal failed to get sufficient support to progress. Tom says that with his son Tim coming in to the farm business, the next generation might be keener to more fully utilise the EID tag data. Related software would also continue to improve and become more user-friendly. "We don't rush into buying software as it is always evolving and I'd rather wait until it gets better. In another few years, the software and equipment we use with our tags will become easier," Tom says.



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