



CASE STUDY

Marc and Naomi Cooper

At a glance

Marc and Naomi Cooper, in partnership with Raymond and Rowena Brock.

Location: Cooina, Waipahi, South Otago

Stock numbers wintered: 2960 Coopworth/Texel ewes, 740 Coopworth/ Texel hoggets, 40 cows, 120 yearling and R2 cattle depending on the season, store cattle are often bought in to finish winter crops and up to 900 store lambs may be bought in to finish.

RapID tag

Challenges

- Increasing productivity within the flock.
- Genetic improvement so they can create an elite mob producing twins.

Benefits

- As a management tool the tags gauge liveweight and how well the farm is feeding stock.
- Record liveweights which indicate how well their mothers are milking and mothering ability.
- Target good growth rates to get the lambs off their mothers.



Livestock Intelligence™

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When Waipahi sheep and beef farmer Marc Cooper originally invested in Allflex EID ear tags for his replacement two-tooth ewes four years ago, it was a leap of faith towards his goal of increasing productivity of the farm's commercial Coopworth/ Texel ewe flock.

At that time he didn't have the technology to read the ear tags. Since then he has installed a Racewell sheep handler with built-in EID reader to record the data collected and uses a wand as a back-up. "It's probably only in the last couple of years that we've had the technology to start scanning and reading the information," he says, but already that early investment is starting to pay off.

Marc originally worked as a livestock disease scientist at the University of Otago and moved on to a successful career in viticulture. But he missed working with stock and eventually returned to his family's sheep and beef farm at Clydevale, which has since been sold. Just over four years ago, he and his wife Naomi were offered an opportunity to enter into an equity partnership with his uncle and aunt, Raymond and Rowena Brock, on a larger two man property at Waipahi. Raymond has run the farm for 30 years and done a lot of the development, so the focus for the new partnership has been a fresh start restocking it. Instead of buying in replacement ewe lambs, they are introducing new genetics to breed their own with the goal of improving lamb productivity.

The farm buys Coopworth/Texel rams from Garth Shaw's Wharetoa Genetics and is already seeing an improvement in

lamb performance, with carcase yields at the works increasing. "Scanning is up 13% this year and even in a dry season last year our scanning was still up, so feeding stock well is a big thing," Marc says. "We're trying to build ewe numbers and would like to get up to lambing 3000 ewes and increase hogget numbers to 800." Originally, the decision to use EID ear tags on replacement ewe lambs was to prove the flock's genetic improvement and ultimately to create an elite mob producing twins.

Marc started by tagging about 950 replacement ewe lambs at weaning four years ago, his selection based on growth rates, conformation and drafting off any small lambs by eye. He has continued this practice every year since. In future, he may switch to EID tagging replacements earlier (at tailing) so he can record liveweights, which may give him some valuable information on how well their mothers are milking, their mothering ability as well as lamb growth rates. By next year the whole ewe flock will be tagged and their liveweights will be recorded every time they go through the yards, usually about six times a year.

As a management tool the tags give Marc a good gauge on liveweights and how well the farm is feeding stock. The property grows both winter and summer crops and buys in a supply of locally grown barley, held in reserve in two on-farm silos for any tight feed spells and flushing ewes. "If things get tight, barley is one of our first avenues."

With just a couple of season's results under his belt since he started recording, Marc can already see the value in the EID technology, which gives him an extra tool to draft on weight gain. "Our average lamb carcase weight is 18.6kgs, which is up over a kilogram on what we have been doing." There may be a combination of factors contributing to that improvement, he says, notably the injection of new genetics. While he has had

a few teething problems with the system, he is planning a few modifications to get it up to speed. "EID tags have definitely had an effect on selecting replacements and we expect better results in the next couple of years," he says.

"Increasing liveweight gain through selecting ewe hoggets is our focus at the moment." "We don't get hung up on kill weights, but we do target good growth rates to get the lambs off their mothers, growing quickly and off the farm early, which is important."

Marc starts weaning early singles in the last week of November and aims to have at least 30% of farm-bred lambs off the property by Christmas. That frees the farm up to buy in store lambs before Christmas and store cattle are bought in at any time of the year to clean up excess winter crop or feed, depending on the season. Weighing up the financial cost of EID tagging, Marc reckons the returns are already there. Based on a \$6.50 a kg payout on 3,500 lambs killed annually, he estimates an actual ear tag cost of \$1.02 each for his ewe hoggets when the cost is spread over all lambs. That figure includes a significant annual cost to run Farm IQ. "When you work back, that is only 150 grams per lamb. So all I've got to do to justify that cost is to gain 150 grams per lamb that we sell and to me we're doing that now."

The next step for Marc may be to separate ewes with a history of producing singles, twins and triplets into A and B mobs which could be run together during summer and winter to make management easier and then easily drafted into separate mobs for mating and lambing. "The ideal situation for me would be to have an EID reader in the yards and run stock through it without having to stop and weigh each animal."



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