



CASE STUDY

Daniel Preece

Daniel Preece – manager
Pohuetai Farms, East of Dannevirke
2174ha (1970ha effective) breeding, finishing
and trading property.

Challenges

- Building a detailed profile of the flock.
- Being able to identify more efficient sheep.

Benefits

- Availability of information makes life easier.
- Helps keep track of parentage and which lambs have been vaccinated.
- Identify lighter animals and feed them accordingly.
- Identify which ewes consistently produce singles.

Pohuetai farms is building a detailed profile of its flock before working on making the most of the information gained from EID tagging, says manager Daniel Preece. “We’re analysing it but not utilising it to the full extent... yet.”

Detailed history building for top Tararua flock

The business is a 2174ha (1970ha effective) breeding, finishing and trading property on Otopo Road, East of Dannevirke. It has been owned by the Knight family for 135 years. As well as carrying 528 R1 bulls, 503 R2 bulls and 106 R1 and R2 Angus heifers, the farm has an almost 14,000 strong sheep flock; 5300 Highlander ewes are put to maternal Highlander rams and 4200 to terminal rams, plus 2800 ewes hoggets are put to terminal Primera rams.

“We finish as much of the progeny as we can and store whatever we need to at the time. We can also buy lambs back in to winter finish if we can. That’s just the target.” About 10% of lambs are killed off mum at weaning at 16.5kg carcass weight with a target of 4000 lambs gone before Christmas.

The farm used to be home to a Focus Genetics Highlander sheep stud until three years ago, which means most of the ewe flock are EID-tagged. Without the stud, the availability of information isn’t essential but makes life easier, he says.



For now, the focus is on the ewe hoggets. "They're shorn as ewe lambs in February then we get the conveyor in and they get an Allflex EID tag and toxo[plasmosis] vaccine so we know for sure who has had it. If they're tagged, they've had their vaccine and other animal health treatments as replacements."

With an aim to identify more efficient sheep, Preece says they're using the EID process to target tail-end ewes and remove them from the breeding flock. "They're condition scored as a hogget at weaning, hand on, then we'll check them pre-tup as a two-tooth then at scanning as a two-tooth. We're only just getting this information; this is the first time we've done it. Anything light went in with the triplets after scanning to be preferentially fed. "We're just talking to the scanner to get him to record that information as he goes, that it's a lighter ewe, so we can start following it a bit more. As they go to the maternal breeding flock as a four-tooth we'll check them again. If they're light again, they'll go to a terminal sire with the B mob."

Preece says he was pretty happy with scanning results this year – 180% for the ewes and 145% for the ewe hoggets – despite the tough, dry season. "Talking to the local guys, it's the worst they've seen. The ewes seem to have held up really well but being able to identify lighter animals does give us flexibility to get rid of another class of stock if we need to."

Lambing starts on August 22 with four start dates depending on the mob and the country they're on. Preece is also collecting data on wet dries in the hoggets. "They're scanned. There's no marking of what's inside them, it's just recorded, which means

there's nothing on the wool when they're shorn. Wool buyers don't want the marks but it's also to make sorting easier for the woolhandlers too. "Pre-lamb we'll draft five ways on weight and number of foetuses from the machine on the EID and then set stocked accordingly based on what type of feed we have. If anything's a bit light, we can put it on the better feed."

The information is recorded into Farm IQ but Preece describes it as more of a storage tool as this stage. "We're utilising that as more of a diary for that information. It's good for showing you the actual age structure of the flock, because it gives a full breakdown of every ewe, which in hindsight, means we can set stock the B flock mixed-aged ewes by age off the EID if we need to. That's mainly driven by an opportunity to sell ewes with lambs at foot; just another market to try and capture if we need to. It's that flexibility again."

Possibilities for the future will become clearer as they follow the ewe lambs through the flock. "The most beneficial one, along with the lights, will be whether they've reared a lamb as a hogget and then no wet dries going into the maternals as a four-tooth. We're also looking at multiplies only into the A flock, so if they've had two years of singles, they're out."

Preece started working at Pohuetai Farms 14 years ago as a block manager and now manages the whole operation with the help of two block managers Matt Williamson, who has been there four years, and long-time employee Graeme Webster. There are also two shepherds, Eilish O'Neill and April Hoera.



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