



CASE STUDY

Richard Tosswill

At a glance

Richard Tosswill

Location: 646ha farm. East of Masterton

Stock: 2800 ewes, 900 ewe hoggetts, 110 beef cow herd and replacements

EID tags ewe hogget replacements

Challenges

- Lambing problems due to overfeeding.
- Managing the data and build history on each animal in the flock, to be used for future selection decisions.

Benefits

- Capture pregnancy data at ewe scanning, body condition scores and liveweights to build a more detailed profile of the flock.
- Improve ewe selection based on efficiency of lamb production.
- Improve the overall fertility of the mixed age flock and identify singles and lates.

After three years of electronic identification (EID) tagging ewe hogget replacements, Wairarapa farmer Richard Tosswill is now ready to extract much greater insights from his ewe flock. He's capturing pregnancy data at ewe scanning, body condition scores through the year and liveweights to build a more detailed profile of his flock and its progeny. A primary intention in tagging his annual crop of ewe hogget replacements is to improve ewe selection based on their efficiency of lamb production. But he's also mindful of the signals coming from meat companies on farmers providing full traceability and production history back to farm of origin. Richard admits he's struggled initially with how to process and make more use of his captured data sets, but that's high on his agenda now he has built up the history over the past three years. The Tosswills farm 646ha (622ha effective) east of Masterton where they winter 2800 ewes and 900 ewe hoggets (all mated), plus a beef cow herd of 110 cows and replacements. Depending on weather conditions and pasture growth, they usually incorporate some winter finishing of trade lambs and run up to 150 rising one or two-year cattle. Less than 10% of their farm is cultivatable and the balance is medium to steep hill country, typically summer dry with limited finishing capability. Lamb weaning starts in mid-November for the mixed age flock and continues, depending on the season, through to early January for the ewe hogget lambs. Richard puts a big emphasis on lamb growth rate to de-risk his business against the impact of the regular dry summers. He typically slaughters 40-50% of lambs at weaning, averaging around 16.5kg carcase weight.



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Lamb weaning weights in 2019 ranged from 30-32kg in the mixed age mobs, and averaged about 30kg for the two-tooths and around 32kg for the ewe hogget lambs. All ewe hoggets are mated. EID tagging of his replacement ewe hoggets means he can now start to select more accurately and improve the overall fertility of his mixed age flock. It also means he can assess the performance of progeny bred from rams from new sources. "We don't have a really fecund ewe flock. It's Texel-Coopworth cross," Richard says. "So, tagging them means we can now easily identify our lower producers - singles and lates - and that history is there for us to run them through our three-way auto drafting unit to split them off for culling later if we choose to." Richard is also keen to sort out what he terms "repeat offenders" - ewes that are overfat most of the year and typically rear a single lamb. With individual tagging, these ewes don't just "disappear" into the flock at set stocking time. He is also experimenting with mating some of his ewe flock to straight Romney sires. EID tagging means the performance of their resulting progeny can be tracked easily for comparison against other sire groups. He's installed a Te Pari auto-drafting system at his main yards and has a small scales unit at the satellite yards near the back of the property. Richard is also seeing value in managing feed allocation based on individual lamb liveweight gain. "I'm a big-time 'weigher' of stock. I've always weighed stock because I like to see information that gives you a clearer picture on what they are doing per day." A good example of its value is his change of tack with ewe

hoggets in late pregnancy when he has experienced lambing problems from over-feeding. But with Allflex EID tags and regular weighing, he can be more precise in his allocation of feed in that critical final trimester. Ewe lambs are typically fed on crops and EID tags mean he can sift out under-performers on actual weight gain data, rather than just a liveweight, for moving back to another crop or on to pasture. The Tossills are also members of a producer group which supplies lambs to a group of specialist finishers, who also have the capability to track the weight gain and yield performance at slaughter of mobs of lambs. "I'd tag all the male progeny if it meant that offering full traceability allowed access to premium meat markets. But at this point, we're just tagging a few so our finishers in the producer group can track performance of each line of lambs." He's hoping that the finishers will reward him for superior yield, weight gain performance and carcase conformation of his lambs.

On reflection, he says the past three years of EID tagging has not created higher returns or a more productive flock, but he can now see scope for this from here on. "We were already tagging our replacement ewe hoggets anyway, so there's no more effort or time to put in an EID tag. The key for us is to find easy ways to manage the data to build the history on each animal in our flock so it can be used for selection decisions in the future," Richard says. "It suits my personality to be in control of the numbers. So it's great to be able to compare performance of single and twin-born lambs or progeny from different ram sources without a lot of extra work and manual recording," he says.



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www.allflex.global/nz | custserv@allflex.co.nz