



CASE STUDY

Matt and Lynley Wyeth

At a glance

Matt and Lynley Wyeth

Location: Spring Valley Enterprises, Kaituna

RapID tag

Challenges

- Frustration with EID tags only going on at weaning
- Being able to identify the genetic capabilities of hoggets
- Increasing dollar value and embracing sustainable farming

Benefits

- Up to date, accurate information that helps make decisions
- Easier to plan the farm feeds
- EID helps them tailor-mate heifers to a specific bull, to focus on genomics

Wairarapa farmers Matt and Lynley Wyeth say electronic identification fits well with where agriculture sits in the modern world. “The customer wants to know how that animal was raised and treated and where it lived,” Matt says.

“Did it lead a nice happy life? Was it sustainable and environmentally friendly? Perhaps right down to whether it was a twin, what its growth rate was, who drenched it and what the drench number was, etc. etc. and they are entitled to make the final decision. “They open the wallet; they can buy a nice prime lamb or Angus sirloin or synthetic or plant stuff or chicken. They’re the one making the purchase and we should be able to give them all the information they want.”

Spring Valley Enterprises is three farms totalling 2100ha (1350ha effective) with three managers and other shepherds – the home farm at Spring Valley at Kaituna, just outside of Masterton has the A flock and ewe lambs and supplies replacements to the other farms – Maranui next door and Ratanui, which is 20km down the road at Mt Bruce. All stock is EID tagged. Lynley says they align their business with Allflex because they’re modern and forward thinking. “They are trying to connect with their customers, which in turn are our customers, to provide them



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with that information. They're thinking ahead. They're advanced in everything they do. Before we need it, they've already thought of it." "They're cutting edge," Matt adds. "They're not selling you a tag, they're selling you a concept. It's tags at the moment, but whether it's chips or rumen collars or virtual fencing ... they were already there doing it."

Matt calls the EID process an "enabler". "It enables us to get accurate information to make decisive decisions, on time, every time; we call it the enabler. One, it helps our managers to have up-to-date information and enables our junior shepherds to operate at a different level as well." Lynley says once the junior staff understand the process and what they're reading, it helps them make decisions out in the paddock. They know the weights and the growth rates and if they can improve one mob that knowledge is useful across the whole business. "You only have to make small incremental gains by tweaking things and you can get a higher growth over 15,000 lambs, which is quite significant," Matt adds. Specific on-farm trials have also shown less need for animal health spending and cut other wastage out of their business. "We know what does and doesn't work for us. It's not necessarily what the EID tagging earns you or makes you, but what it saves you." But there's also the gains achieved because of the competitive nature of their team. "If one guy is doing 320 grams a day and another guy is doing 120, he starts asking the other guy why. Suddenly, they want to step up to another level."

Another successful trial was the use of docking scales two years ago after frustration with the EID tags only going on at weaning. "The first time you get the tag in, the second time you get data. One bit of information is a dot, the second piece of information is a line. The third piece is a trend. If we didn't put a tag on until weaning, we didn't get any information until February. Now we tag in October and it's easier to plan the farms, feed budgets and to book space in the lead up to Christmas."

Linking the kill information is another level of data. "We can see the different ones being rotationally grazed and set stocked, the ones that had a B12 on the docking board, the ones grazed on plantain or rape, the ones with a pre-lamb worm drench. We did a check last year on the difference between tape drench and a triple. You have that information in front of you to make those management decisions. Why wouldn't you?"

The Wyeths want to utilise as much information as they can. "We just wouldn't go and weigh stock, for example, without EID because you're only going to get one piece of information. When you weigh with EID you get five, six or 10 things, whatever information you want – different groups, traits, animal health, paddocks, feed regimes, twins/singles, breed – whatever you decide. We're always finding ways to use it.

Like anything, when you start out you grow with it and find out what else it can do for you. "It's when you start getting results and making active decisions because of it that the rewards come." The latest thing for the couple is genomics, which needs EID to be accurate down to individual animals.

"We're a commercial farm but we're effectively working like a stud farm. It's indexing on steroids with a lot more accuracy. We won't buy rams or bulls from people who aren't using this latest technology because it's not keeping up with our latest technology."

They have done some genomics recently with their heifers through Inherit Selection (Zoetis) that means they can use AI to tailor-mate each heifer to a specific bull that best suits her. "We can really hone in; EID is giving us that connection." It is likely to be expanded to include the ewe hoggets. "There is a cost, but what is the cost of not doing it. We need to increase a kilo on hoggets so potentially we're looking to do 3000 hoggets and find out, with complete confidence, if these animals are capable to doing what we want our future sheep to do."

Genetic mapping showed the potential of the flock, but Matt says going down to an individual basis will take them to another level of increasing production. "If we were told the hoggets could do 145% scanning but they're doing 120%, we're not letting them express their full genetic potential. We can bust our arse and do a whole lot out there," he says, pointing to the paddock, "and try to do everything, but without knowing whether the animal is actually able to do what we want, we're wasting our time. EID is our vehicle to do that. It's our enabler".

Matt's advice for farmers looking at expanding their EID capabilities is to take that first step. "If you don't know how it works now, you're going to miss the next level and all of a sudden the game is going to be far advanced and you're not going to be able to catch up.

"We do a range of things down to intensive triplet management; I'm not saying everyone should go there, but at least take that one step and start scanning for them. Once you do that, look at how you feed them. It's a staircase. Don't miss five steps and try to jump into the deep end, but gradually get on board. Every farm is different, and it must suit the farmer and how they're running their business, so find your own way. But keep taking that one step forward."

The tools are available from a commercial point of view, Matt says. "We're getting the dollar benefit at the end of the day. Part of sustainable farming is to stay in business, so we need to have money. If we can farm more efficiently and easily and be kind to the environment, then it's a win in all fronts."

The couple used to give a small proportion of lambs to Matt's father. "He used to grow them at about 440g a day. If we were sitting at 300 then, what was in-between was the opportunity. I know he only had a small number of lambs to concentrate on but imagine if we could duplicate that over 15,000 lambs." Information gleaned from EID has led to Spring Valley Enterprises selling excess ewe lambs for the first time last year. "Because of what we're doing with breeding, we've been able to market our lambs quite differently. With our proven ewe record, that we can demonstrate through 15 years of scanning data and weaning weights, the proof is in the pudding. We know all this information about them ... so we're selling them as genetic

ewe lambs and getting a premium for it. It also helps us offload stock earlier, which helps the whole farm system with flexibility for summer.” They could do the same with the genomic testing of the heifers, having tested 150 but only needing 60 for themselves.

The Wyeths follow their stock information through Farm IQ to benchmark themselves against the dozen other different summer wet, breeding/finishing farms in the Wairarapa-Wellington zone. “We like setting that benchmark. If we’re behind, we want to know why.” They also enter awards and competitions for the same reason. “We don’t enter to win, but to see if we’re doing any good on a regional or national scale,” Lynley says.

They’ve proven their business economically with the Wairarapa Farm Business of the Year, environmentally with the Ballance Farm Environment Awards, stock wise with the Glammies, Steak of Origin, hogget competition and Silver Fern Farms Gate to Plate, and industry-wise with innovation awards. “It’s good for our staff too. We want them to be proud of our land and our stock, so we enter as a team and they’re a big part of that.” One of the latest extra activities on the farm agenda has been planting 20,000 natives at Ratanui. “They’re not EID-tagged though,” Lynley says, laughing.

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