

Marlow Genetics shifts up a gear with EID

Farm Facts

Marlow Hills (350ha, 300ha effective plus 50ha native and production forestry)

Owners: Wyn-Harris Family Equity Partnership

Equity Managers: Jason and Rosa Wyn-Harris

Location: Hatuma, Central Hawke's Bay

Flock: 1250 ewes, comprising 800 commercial ewes (150% survival to sale with 50% progeny sold at 17kg carcase weight at weaning); 200 stud ewes and replacements

Cattle: 150 R2 bulls, slaughtered and replaced each summer

Ram sales: Up to 100 each year

Labour: Jason full-time, father Steve part-time

Allflex client: "Decades!"

Allflex tag choice: RapID EID



Jason Wyn-Harris is a man on a mission.

As the third-generation guardian of his family's central Hawke's Bay easy to medium hill country properties, farmed as Marlow Hills, Jason has high expectations for their future performance under his watch.

Electronic identification (EID) tags have been used since 2013 in the family's Marlow Genetics Coopworth and Romworth studs, but Jason is taking it to a new level in his quest for breeding rams more resistant to internal parasites.

He and his wife Rosa are equity managers for the Wyn-Harris family's two farms, totalling 300ha of grazing area and 50ha of production and native forests. The properties are only a few kilometres apart, in a region of the country renowned for its bone-dry summers, balanced by healthy soils and reliable early spring growth.

The climate demands a flexible livestock strategy.

First to go if conditions turn dry are the 150 rising-two-year Friesian bulls they aim to finish before the dry summer conditions bite. They are either slaughtered at lower carcase weights or sold in forward store condition, but if the pressure for feed remains high, they are not replaced until later in the year.

Sheep are the primary focus for Jason's intensive livestock operation and he is reliant on Allflex to deliver the latest EID tags and tag applicators to keep him ahead of the flock.

They run 1250 ewes, including 800 high-performing commercial ewes that are mated to terminal sires, plus

about 200 stud ewes and hogget replacements, all mated.

Ram breeding at Marlow Hills started 55 years ago when his grandfather became frustrated with the low performance of his sheep flock and began breeding his own rams.

Jason's father Steve carried on the legacy, refining the highly fertile Coopworth stud flock after taking over from his parents about 40 years before, and immediately embarking on improving the flock's tolerance to facial eczema (FE) which was emerging as a significant issue for North Island sheep flocks.

"Facial eczema started really making an impact back then and that's when my father Steve doubled down on breeding for FE resistance." Jason says.

Having locked in high FE tolerance under Steve's watch, Jason has shifted his focus to breeding rams that show superior resistance to the effects of internal parasites, another significant production challenge for flock owners.

He is using the RapID tags this year for the first time, tagging close to 400 stud lambs at birth in the paddock and adding a visual identification tag after an initial culling several months later.

Tagging at birth means he can reliably identify the dam of the lambs but the RapID tags also allow him to easily record and manage individual production data, such as liveweights, dag scores, and drench history over the lifetime of his sheep.

The tags make the two-weekly weighing and faecal egg sampling for his ram lambs an easier and more efficient task in his quest to raise the tolerance his rams have to internal parasite challenge.

"We're recording if our lambs have lost, held or gained weight over each two-week period, and we're making a

decision whether to drench or not based on live weight gains and their faecal egg counts." he says.

Any lambs requiring a drench are recorded along with the product used. By the end of the season, Jason is able to make selection decisions based on the individual performance of each ram in the year group.

"When we get to ram selling time in December, I can now scan each ram's tag and let buyers know how many times that ram has been drenched in its life and where it ranks on Sheep Improvement Limited's Dual Purpose Internal Parasite Resistance (DPF) index.

"That is powerful when it comes to ram sale time, but also for my own decisions, when I'm looking at rams to use in our own stud.

"I can also make decisions quickly and easily out on the farm or in the yards, by scanning tags and looking at the data, and not having to come home and flip through a whole lot of papers."

The tags also allow him to store other useful information on each animal in the flock such as body condition scores, live weights, and sometimes dag scores.

Given the high value of the stud sheep flock and the importance of having a secure source of data to review out in the field, Jason says tag retention is critical.

"Losing tags is quite a costly exercise. We just can't afford to be having tags fall out and that is why we've stuck with Allflex because we find the tag retention's good and acceptable for us."

"Our biggest risk for tag retention is in the first 12 months from birth because they only have one form of ID until they get their visual ID tag as well. If a tag does drop out during that first year, that sheep is out of the stud because we can't identify who they are or who they belong to."

This lambing, he used the RapIDMatic Applicator to tag lambs at birth.



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