

# Romney trial triumphs

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Genetic progress in the Merial Ancare Romney NZ ram progeny trial is paying off in lamb returns.

A gulf of \$6/lamb of carcase value conferred to its progeny between the top ram in the trial and that passed on by the bottom ram could mean over \$900 extra return from one mating season by using the top ram. This is the kind of enormous progress the group can make by working together, member Ross Humphrey says.

“The scheme works on trust and collectively we can get the fastest gains possible.”

The scheme tests the progeny of 10-12 sires each year and is run by Romney NZ with Merial Ancare sponsorship using ewes on the Ashhurst farm of Kerry Osborne. Romney breeders are invited to submit their best rams for the trial, which identifies the top performers for growth and meat-yield traits by mating each ram to 70 ewes and comparing the progeny.

From last season's over 700 progeny, 10% of male progeny from the trial flock were killed in December at 17.45kg, netting \$132.20. The late January second draft averaged 18.3 and netted \$130.82, and the final draft on February 22 averaged 19.4kg and netted \$123.98.

All the lambs were killed through Alliance's Dannevirke plant to capture the yield and individual muscle group data, which was downloaded to SIL where the genetic analysis is done.

The farmers employ Lincoln University student Abbie Pont for two weeks to weigh and electronically tag each lamb at birth, beginning on August 13 after mating for 12-14 days from March 15. The rams then travel back to home flocks or to other flocks to be mated and build strong linkages between the flocks. Each breeder submitting a ram needs two strong linkages to other flocks.

The submitting farmers then get together to dock, blood sample for DNA testing, wean and weigh the lambs. At weaning on December 14 the trial lambs weighed an average of 31.5kg and ranged from 21.5-51.5kg. Female lambs are sent back to each ram owner, weighing an average of 42kg. The top lambs yielded 50% and Humphreys says the trial aims to lift yields of all lambs to that level.

The winning rams change around each year, and the top ram is entered into the Central Progeny Test the following year which further enhances the linkages.

Now the North Island and South Island breeders have been testing for five years, the group is considering establishing a group in the Waikato so higher ram numbers can be tested.

## **Pondering pleurisy**

Progeny testing and electronic tagging have allowed concurrent research into why progeny of some rams in the Romney NZ progeny test have no pleurisy while the condition is widespread in others.

Pleurisy can be an enormous cost to the industry; the disease reduces growth rates by up to 30%.

All the trial lambs are graded for pleurisy on a 1-3 scale at Alliance and AgResearch is working with the group to identify the infection factors.

## **Caption**

Abbie Pont from Lincoln University spends her spring holidays tagging and weighing progeny trial lambs.