



ROMNEY NZ INC

NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2012

Presidents Report

Dear fellow breeders,

Times are back to what we are used to with predications of lamb prices falling along with wool. The one big positive is that most sheep farmers have had a very good lambing nationwide. The world recession doesn't help us but people still need the products we produce. It is essential we be positive as the world's supply of food is drying up and shortages are growing.

John Jackson has retired from council and David Tennent has stepped into John's vacancy. Recently we had a council meeting which was very positive on the direction we want the breed to head. The two meat trials are being a big part of measuring the breed's performance not only in meat yield but other traits also. Clare Callow has taken over being the analyst for all the SIL data. Already we have seen a big change and hopefully we can get some up to date hard evidence of what's happening in the trials.

Clare has formulated how each sire that has been in the trial over the last six years has performed. We will get this info to you all shortly (see two reports below). It is essential we get a ram in the CPT trial this year to represent our breed and to judge where we are in comparison to other dual purpose so called breeds. Two Romney trial lambs are entered in the national Mint Lamb Competition being held at the Christchurch Show shortly.

Romney NZ has agreed to work with AgResearch to develop the SNP Chip technology. So far they need a DNA sample taken from all stud rams that have been used in the past and present. The idea here is to accumulate as much parenthood as possible. Ike Williams has a report regarding SNP Chip technology on page 3.

The wool trial has taken a twist especially with Wool Equities taken over the Yarn mill at Milton and the weaving factory at Palmerston North. The idea here is to produce wool that fine that it can be made into cloth not carpet. (report below)

All in all there is a fair amount of work going on behind the scenes. It is interesting how many overseas countries are making inquiries about our breed. So far this year we have had emails from Scotland, USA, Canada, Czech Republic, Uruguay and Australia.

Wish all ram sellers a successful season.

Regards Hugh Taylor

South Island Meat Trial – Hugh Taylor

This year we have 10 rams in the trial inclusive of the one that was in the North linking the two trials. Ewes went to the ram in good nick hence another high lambing percentage. All lambs were weighed at birth, tagged and mothers given a score on mothering ability. Docking hasn't finished yet. A blood sample is taken when the lamb is earmarked for DNA purposes at docking also the lamb is weighed again. Weaning will take place in mid December. Beef and Lamb NZ hope to have a field day at the South Island trial on 11th December.

Special thanks to our major sponsors Merial Ancare and Allflex.

North Island Meat Trial – Ross Humphrey

The trial is progressing well; Selwyn Steven was employed to do the tagging and he and Kerry have got on really well and we have 777 lambs docked from the 10 sires. It is very good to have the link sire DB203/09 used in the trial and I also mated some ewes to him so a very good comparison should be able to be made between the two trials. Thanks to Hugh for letting him come north.

The lambs have better feed covers this year so the lambs look good so should get a good draft off mum in Mid December; then second draft end of January and finally last draft end of February. All nine participants are fully linked together so some very meaningful data will come out. Eczema testing of five ewe lambs by each sire can be done at a cost of \$200 per lamb which is a good starting point for those going down that path.

Funding was spoken about at the last meeting for some of this. Blood samples were taken from each sire at mating and a sample from each lamb at docking so these will be forwarded to Jon Hickford shortly. Discussions need to be had with someone on the CPT panel to make sure Romney NZ has a space for the winner of this trial as we are very widely linked now. Finally a big thank you to David Dodge from Merial Ancare; without his financial help it would be so much harder and to Nathan Stewart from Allflex PN for the tags and all his time and advice which is very much appreciated.

Wool Trial – Hugh Taylor

For two years now all the ewes on the Taylor property have been tested for micron, curve (crimp) and bulk using Pastoral Managements Ltd technology. All individual animals were side sampled on farm inclusive of ram hoggets. There was a big variation in micron and curvature. Now that we have those results the plan is to push the Romney as fine as we can get without losing too much weight or gaining wool faults. The aim is to get the wool down to 30 micron with high curvature. It will take five plus generations to get close but the challenge is there.

We would like to know if a breeder has a ram that has fine wool would they be interested in getting it tested and putting it up in this trial. Please contact me on 033124267.

“Go Finer” – Jon Hickford, Lincoln University

A proposal is being developed in concert with Lincoln University, Pastoral Measurements Ltd and Wool Equities to investigate the breeding of Romney sheep (and possibly other cross-bred sheep) to

produce finer wool. Currently some Romney ewes have wool of mean fibre diameter (MFD) in excess of 50 micron mean, while others are below 34 micron. What-is-more, as MFD drops fibre curvature tends to increase and this makes for better spinning wool and superior yarns.

These yarns can be utilised to manufacture quality woven out-layer clothing such as jackets and dress coats and these garments of course have all the superior benefits of wool including the ability to be physically resilient, being made of a renewable natural fibre, having unique thermal , absorptive and antibacterial properties and being flame-proof.

The proposal will be a complement to current moves to increase the productivity of fine wool sheep, although the wool traits that we plan to breed for in Romney are highly heritable as opposed to the low heritability of reproduction and growth traits that would need to be dramatically improved to increase the economic viability of farming fine-wool sheep.

While reducing MFD may reduce wool weight, it is hoped that the net benefit is positive, especially if effort is also made to maintain current wool weights.

While this project is still very much at the planning stage, it is hoped that both breeders and commercial properties will be involved and that other Rom-cross type sheep (discussion has been had already with Perendale breeders) may also choose to be involved.

The core of the project would involve on-farm wool testing for both curvature and MFD and the tagging of a proportion of 2-tooth replacement ewes each year as “wool ewes”. It is hoped that for ram breeders a specialised wool selection index can be created such that maternal trait performance can be maintained while concurrently improving MFD and curvature in studs and for selected sale rams.

The programme will require some financial input from Romney farmers, but it is believed that the benefits should outweigh any direct costs in the longer term. Any comments or interest in participation should be directed to Jon Hickford at Lincoln University (Ph 027 280 1285 or Home 03 328 8518).

SNP CHIP – Ike Williams

As most of you are probably aware we are continuing to develop our relationship with AgResearch. They are working with us on a number of things with our meat trials. One of the things that all breeders who are on SIL can assist them with, and ultimately ourselves and the Breed as a whole, is to provide DNA samples of your sires to AgResearch with the purpose of increasing the size of the database for the SNP chip which in turn will enable them to improve the accuracy of that chip, which at present is well under 50%

The more data that goes in the greater the likelihood we could get this technology to say an accuracy of 75%, which is when I would personally use it.

On behalf of the council I ask all breeders who are on SIL (as this is required to evaluate the data) to contact Lucy Archer of AgResearch on 03 489 9093 or 021 289 9093 and ask her to forward to you what is required to take the samples. It's a fairly straight forward process as I can personally vouch for, having done it this winter.