



This year our Autumn Newsletter has turned into a Winter Newsletter – there's been lots happening! As we are well through winter we have more news to share so this version will be a bit longer than normal. I hope you make time to read it and catch up with what's happening at Nithdale. It has been a very challenging season for sheep farmers. With lower prices for both ewes and lambs, most sheep farmers have struggled to make a profit this year. At least in Southland we had good grass growing conditions all season but further north, particularly the rest of the South Island's east coast, drier weather made the situation worse. Most farmers have had to tighten their belts and cut back on spending including ourselves. This has also been reflected in our ram sales with a number of clients reducing the number purchased and giving the 'older boys' another year which I can fully understand in such a tight year. In times like this we need to focus on the positives and do the best with the things that we can control. We also need to look out for each other. More than happy to talk with anyone about the issues you are facing so give me a call if you would like to chat. They say a problem shared is a problem halved!

How Ridiculous

Nothing to do with sheep genetics but some light relief for us back in April was some guys from Australia, who call themselves 'How Ridiculous', who came to our farm and spent a week on top of the highest point (The Trig - 397m) rolling all sorts of things down the hill, including boats, caravans, cars and tyres just to name a few! They make a living by doing crazy videos and posting them on You Tube, Instagram, Facebook and Tik Tok. Between those 4 social media platforms they have over 40 million subscribers. They have released four longer videos and a number of short clips on

Youtube so if you google 'How Ridiculous' you'll get to see what they got up to. It wasn't all fun and games, so thanks to Russell and staff who helped out with getting a lot of stuff up to the top of the hill and then had to put up with 3 fences down to minimize the destruction and a wide area out of action before the fences got put back up! It was great though to also see a lot of kids involved from Camp Columba where the guys went to as well for an evening to share with them and a lot of campers came and helped clean up on farm too.



Scott, Derek and Brett from 'How Ridiculous' with Levi from Camp Columba on top of the Trig at Nithdale

Early July, I went to the Sheep Breeders Forum in Christchurch which was a great opportunity to catch up with the latest in sheep breeding in New Zealand and the direction of Beef and Lamb Genetics. Some of the highlights were:

- An improvement this season in the genetic evaluation that will give more accuracy
- Improvements in nProve - both the breeders and commercial farmers platform
- A look at production gains using lucerne on Willesden Farms on Banks Peninsula at the end of the Forum

It was also a great opportunity to network with other breeders around the country to share ideas and pass on information. We had a forum two years ago in Napier that Russell and I both went to but that was cut short after just half a day due to Covid (remember those days?). So great to have a full two days in Christchurch this time.

Gains in Meat Quality

There are a number of components which effect meat quality such as pH, colour, tenderness and intra muscular fat (IMF). IMF itself is a key predictor of meat quality and as such is increasingly becoming more important within the red meat industry. Within the beef industry high IMF has long been sort after in some markets - especially in Japan where it is expressed particularly in Wagyu cattle. In lambs the years of breeding high yielding, lean, meaty animals has had a negative impact on meat quality. Fat is actually a good thing in terms of eating quality, particularly the intra muscular fat and markets are starting to recognize this. In Australia, there are a number of companies which are paying more for lambs that have higher IMF and it will only be a matter of time before that is happening in New Zealand. For the last 18 months Alliance have been working with MEQ, an Australian based company, which has produced a probe that measures IMF on lambs and Alliance have been installing this technology in all their plants throughout this season. The plan is to provide data to farmers from next season on

IMF and develop grades (alongside their handpicked lamb program) which will extract more value from markets that are prepared to pay more for higher IMF lambs. The range in IMF in lambs that have been measured by Alliance over this last season has been significant (from 1-6% IMF).

Over the last 8 years we have been involved in the South Island Genomic Calibration Flock at Duncraigen which has focused on producing genomics or information based on DNA in relation to meat quality and we have made some significant gains in improving IMF in our Suflex flock. Over the same time as we have been selecting for improved meat quality, we have also continued to make significant gains in productive traits (growth, yield and survival). So improving both meat quality and production at the same time is possible. As higher premiums become available from meat companies for meat quality we will be in a good position to benefit our clients going forward.



Suflex Ram Hoggets May

On The Ranch with Russell

We are well into winter mode here at Nithdale. What started out to be a very tough autumn, led into an EXTREMELY wet May & June! Winter feed budgets were showing a deficit due to poorer crop yields this year. We put that down to a rapid growing season Jan/Feb which also meant the weeds grew just as well! Even with the recommended chemistry, the grass and weeds seemed to keep growing back in the crops. On a positive, we managed to raise our total lamb kill weights on average 1.5kgs above last years to 20kgs. This year was also the first time since I've been here at Nithdale, we purchased and finished 1300 store lambs bought in throughout the season. We have been playing around with a lot of different legume, brassica and grass mixes over the last few years, eg, Red Clover stands, Vetch and Hybrid Italians, and I feel we have started to get a real winning formula for different purposes.

One example is sowing Italian ryegrass mixed with a fast establishing kale. This has given us a very high quality feed for multiple grazes at important times of the season. The first grazing in January was ideal for the mid weight line of wether lambs who were on there for 8 weeks rotating on 24ha. These lambs

had one drench going onto the crop and never looked back. The whole line was finished within that time. The 2nd grazing was with 80 18mth beef steers. These lads put on 1.4kgs per day for the 40 days they had on the crop. But the biggest advantage was flushing our stud Romney 2 tooth ewes for the ram. There was a 12% lift on 2023, scanning 182%

The rest of the scanning this year was overall up 3% on 2023 and the ewes are in very good condition, we just need mother nature to play her part for the rest of the winter and spring!!!! Fingers crossed.

The stud Romney ram hoggets this year are absolutely pumping! We have them booked in mid August for shearing and fleece weighting. I'm super excited to compare liveweights this season compared to last. I am sure this year the romney 2 tooth sale rams will be the best presented rams to date!



Blood testing ram hoggets after being used as sires

Nithdale 100 years



1st September 1924 Andrew's Grandfather Charlie Tripp bought Nithdale Station at the age of 22. The farm was carrying 1000 ewes and 30 cattle. Back then the property was described by Charlie's sister as far from inspiring with fallen down fences, run down brown top paddocks, rocks, rabbits and gorse down to the homestead. Things have changed! We are planning an event in October that will be an open invite (RSVP to Andrew) to celebrate this milestone so will keep you posted.

Stud Sale Season

This year's sale season is very fast approaching!

As we are all very aware, last year and this year have both been very tough financial seasons! 75% of our clients bought less rams than usual to cut some costs. The comment was "the 4&6 tooth rams are still looking awesome, we will only buy a couple 2 tooth this year"

This is very encouraging for us to see that our rams are going the distance. This season is shaping up to be just as tight. As the stud business is a large part of Nithdale's overall income, we need it to be economic for us to continue to sell rams. Holding out for top dollar is not always the best option and we want to work with our clients to get the best result for everyone, therefore to sell more rams and keep the genetic gains going forward for the farmers stock we plan to:

- DROP the price on the high index Sufftex rams.
- This year's ELITE RAM SALE will have lower \$ reserves on all breeds.
- We sold out of Sufftex 2th rams last year, so have kept 40 extra
- I have kept 60 of the best high index 2th rams from last season to be sold as 4 tooth for \$600, aimed to be a high quality ram at a discounted price.

The Elite Ram sale and open day will be on Wednesday the 20th of November. We will have the same high quality rams on offer being sold using the "yourbid" online helmsman system.



New Suffolk Stud Ram purchased February 2024 used this Autumn.



Again if anyone wants to chat about our genetics or anything else or like a visit feel free to give either Russell or Andrew a call. All the best for the rest of winter.

Regards, *Russell & Andrew*

Contact RUSSELL on 0274 183 3423 or ANDREW on 027 256 6647, or visit our WEBSITE at www.nithdale.com