

ARKLEY FARM & OHIO POLL DORSET STUD NEWSLETTER



Issue 3 – November 2024

ON THE INTERNET

Our Facebook page is where you will find a regular insight into life at Arkley.

If you could like and interact with our Facebook page it will help the algorithms make us easier to find.

We have also launched our own website where you will find out more about us, the farms we run and our breeding objectives.

GREENSHOTS AND NO DROUGHT IN SIGHT

Another season is rolling around and it's been a very wet spring here. In September and October we had 301.4mm of rain instead on the usual 130mm. While this hasn't been great for staff wellbeing, tailing or tractor work we still had relatively good stock survival and there are other areas far worse off than us. Our team have done an awesome job in trying conditions and it's also great to get some better prices for our wet dry ewes which we averaged \$128, at a lighter weight than last seasons \$100. Our interest rates have also dropped 1.1% with more drops forecast.

We know it is very tough out there, but it has turned a corner and I think it will lead to some uncomfortable conversations about the viability of the current profitability of farming in most sectors. While these conversations are not fun they are very necessary and overdue.

Going forward we must both be more productive and get a higher price for our product, the challenge with sheep compared to grain or dairy is the lack of kg/ha of product sold. This is something we are working on but it's a long game.

ON THE FARM – LIVESTOCK

We are still yet to finish tailing our hogget lambs and are looking as though we may fall just short of our target of 12,000 lambs but we will only know once the last lamb is through the chute.

Going into spring our covers were below where we wanted them to be, so we spread a mix of ammonium sulphate, sulfur 90, selenium and colbalt over our paddock country in late August. We are very glad we did this as it helped over covers and even though they weren't at the levels we would have liked it was better than it would have been otherwise.

Cattle are our flexible class of livestock and normally we buy a decent number each spring. However due to the current feed levels and the prices of cattle, we are running about 1/3 of normal numbers. This may mean a bit more topping in the early summer but we are comfortable with this decision.



*Commercial Cooptex & Romney - Poll
Dorset hoggets getting drafted for
lambing*

ON THE FARM - GRAIN

The wet harvest and autumn sowing season evolved in to a wetter spring and we have sown less grain at Pukerau than planned. We are about 3 weeks behind with tractor work which is better than we were a couple of weeks ago. Our team have done a great job of pushing on, and in the dry windows there hasn't been a lot of sleeping.

While this hasn't been fun, I feel for the ag contractors. How ever hard we are finding it, their job is 10 times harder juggling so many clients who all rightly want their jobs done in these tiny weather windows.

This spring we have installed Yara N Sensor cameras on our spreading tractor. These analyse the Nitrogen content of the grain, grass or brassicas and then control how much fertiliser is applied. This gives a strong economic outcome as well as being environmentally friendly. We firmly believe science is the driver of progress - not rules and regulations. As farmers we all want to protect and enhance our land, and we need to concentrate of economic wins as well as environmental wins.



N Sensor controlled urea on wheat

PROVIDING VALUE – CAN WE BE MORE THAN RAMS?

We got into stud breeding for two main reasons, firstly we enjoy breeding, improving and refining sheep genetics and a desire to work more with our consumers rather than just put our stock or grain on a truck and wait for a payment.

As farmers we are often expected to be experts in every area - from agronomy to weather forecaster, to market trend predicting to Heath and Safety, HR to genetics and taxes.



As a business we have invested significant time, experimentation and money in the sheep breeding and production space. As in the email we sent out with this newsletter we want to know if there are areas within this narrow space where we could help you out. We potentially see this as us putting on a field day, bringing in an expert in a certain areas, learning from some of our farmer clients or doing some research within our business. With the aim of helping progress both our business and yours.

I know you are all very busy at the moment but if you could give a one line reply or even think about the three questions on the email and we can yarn about it at ram selling time would be great.

Spring Seeding 2024, maybe John Deeres aren't so bad

INTRAMUSCULAR FAT (IMF)

If we want to get paid more for our lamb, we must add value. I see two main ways of doing this, heavier lambs (which we are exploring and will elaborate on another time) and higher eating quality.

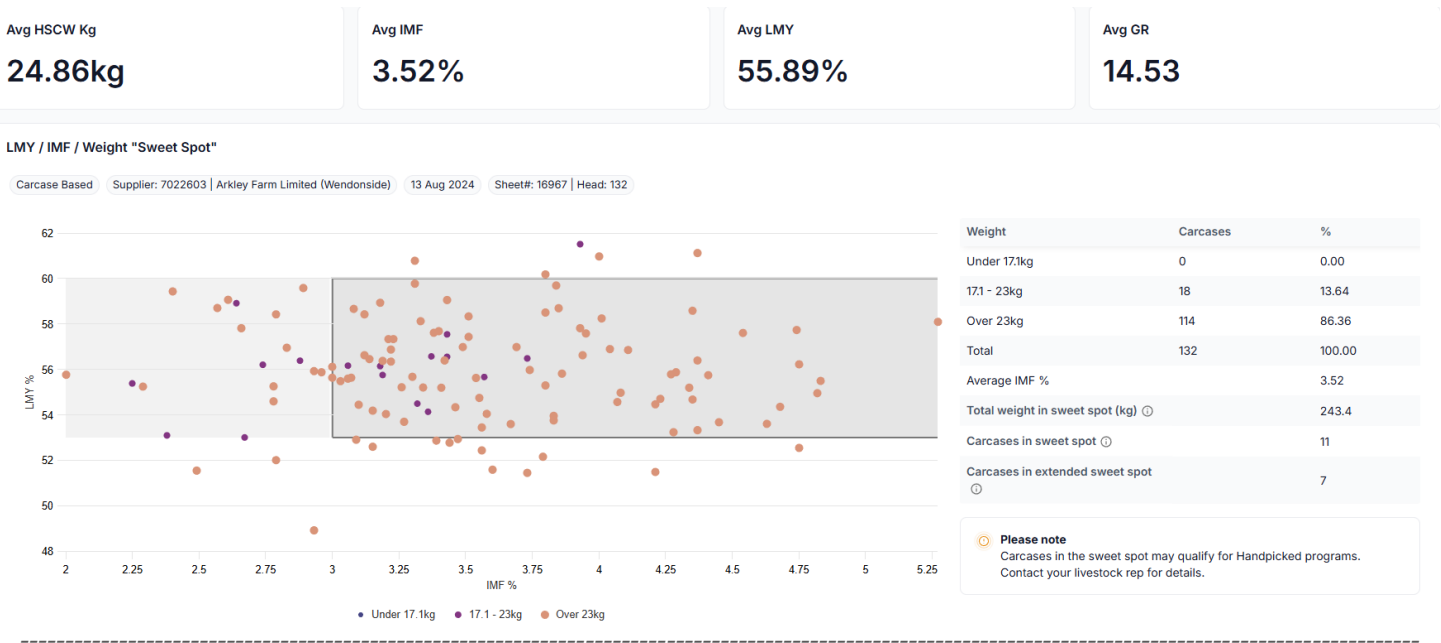
Trevor had already started measuring IMF in both his ram and ewe lambs. This involves scoring the IMF in the eye muscle in the autumn with ultrasound scanning. The biggest trend that we can see is that the fat depth measurement (fat cover over loin) and IMF are well linked. SIL/nProve (Beef & Lambs sheep evaluation system) currently have a negative index value for fat cover in terminal sires but not maternal sire as it is seen as good for the ewes ability to handle adverse conditions. I don't agree with this approach, and the Southern Poll Dorset breeders have seen a good fat cover has always been a priority to help with surviving some of the lambing weather we get.

We have been supplying Alliance (a whole other conversation for another day!) and we appreciate the work they are doing with IMF. In the pictures there is the first line of dry ewe lambs we killed on the 13th of August. Note there is a mix of breeds from Poll Dorset Romney X, Cooptex and Perendales. They are from bigger mobs of ewe lambs at scanning time, not a specialist finishing system but it gives us a starting point to work from.

We look forward to trialing both different genetics and different feeding programs through this assessment and will keep you informed on what we learn. We are grateful for Trevor's foresight to start down this path and as we dig deeper into the stud we can see how aligned our breeding objectives are (Trevor did have 15 years of observing me pick rams to see if we were aligned or not!).



IMF Graph to go with data below



IMF data from our first line of dry ewe lambs killed this season



STUD NEWS – SOUTHERN POLL DORSET BREEDERS

We are fortunate that the Otago & Southland Poll Dorset breeders are made up of some progressive, relatively youngish sheep farmers who have decent commercial sheep operations. Trevor and I went on a Stud Tour last Tuesday looking around studs at Oamaru, Poolburn and a few locals near Gore.

It was great to see what the other breeders were up to and there is real positivity around the Poll Dorset breed down south with the studs all experiencing increasing demand for our rams.

As a group of breeders, we want to operate independently of each other and retain our own breeding objectives but work together to increase the genetic gain of our sheep and the breed. We are currently doing this by using a Cairnlea Poll Dorset ram via AI this season which was being used in the national across breeds Central Progeny Test. This ram was sired by an

Australian ram so will bring some fresh genetics to try out and will increase the accuracy of our figures against other studs around NZ. We also hosted some Oatley Hill ewes at mating which will have help both their and our linkages. We also have a tour around Australia booked for next winter to see what potential genetics are across the ditch.

STUD NEWS – RETIRING STUD BREEDERS AND OUR PLANS

We have seen an ageing sheep stud breeder scene and in the last few months 3 South Island studs we deal with have announced their impending retirements/change of directions. Garth & Chris Shaw at Wharetoa who breed Poll Dorset Texels and Texels. Neville and Dianne Greenwood at Adelong who breed Poll Dorsets. Sam and Deb Stevens at Cairnlea who also breed Poll Dorsets.

We wish them all the best in their retirements and future plans. Both Trevor and I have enjoyed both buying and selling genetics with these breeders as we collectively striving to better the rams we supply our farmer clients.



Stud ewes and hoggets getting drafted for lambing

With our own stud numbers increasing and a plan to continue this going forward we encourage you to mention us to anyone you know who is currently buying from these breeders and looking for rams in the 2025/26 ram selling season and beyond.

This will help increase our genetic base and give us more resources to help increase the rate of genetic gain going forward, to better serve you and your farming business.

STUD NEWS – RAM SALES

We are looking forward to presenting the 2023 born rams to you for sale, they did it a bit tough on crop over winter as it was so wet but have bounced back nicely once they got on the grass in the spring.

It is exciting as these are the rams that were born after I assisted Trevor with mating for the first time and I did my first stud lambing with them.

Trevor and I sorted the sale rams out earlier this month and are excited to see the rams we have to present to you. Of note were the progeny of Ohio 298/22 who we used as a ram lamb, he is leaving Poll Dorset progeny with an impressive carcass shape. When you look at the most progressive studs they are using ram lambs as part of their mating programme. This season we have also used 248/23 (a son of 298/22) who is the result of 3 hogget matings in the last 4 generations this has a massive impact in speeding up genetic gain.

We will be selling our rams in the same manner as last season. There will be 4 or 5 top pick Poll Dorset rams going to the Gore A&P ram fair on the 21st of January. We would encourage any of our local commercial clients to come along to this, as with the current vibe out there, this is a good chance to get the very best rams at a competitive price. If this format interests people we could potentially increase this number going forward.



Sale rams coming into to get sorted early November

Then we will also be selling rams privately in January at Trevor's woolshed. As with last year anyone who needs a hand, we are happy to offer delayed payment terms.

We were pleased to see plenty of spouses and a few kids come along ram buying last season. Once again this season we encourage you to bring along family and team members, we will have some toys and treats to keep the kids occupied if they lose interest. We want to keep encouraging the next generation.

We have a very slight increase in the number of rams available this season, if you could email us with how many you are looking for and whether they are Poll Dorset or Poll Dorset Texels would be great.

There maybe a small number of shedding or shedding cross ram lambs available this autumn, call if this interest you. This is very much experimental at this stage.

As always we welcome your phone calls or visits and enjoy hearing your feedback and what is happening at your place.

Regards,

Pete & Esther Gardyne

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