

# ARKLEY FARM & OHIO POLL DORSET STUD NEWSLETTER



Issue 4 – June 2025

## 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.



*Moving Perendale ewes, with Poll Dorset Rams at the Pyramid Block*

## PARTY TIME - 10 YEARS OF ARKLEY FARM

The 1<sup>st</sup> of July this year marks 10 years of us purchasing Arkley and operating as Arkley Farm (Pete and his family purchased it in 2007 and ran it with the family farm next door for 8 years).

Looking back, it's been a roller coaster ride. Some ups and downs, challenges and opportunities but mostly hard work, determination and some long hours to make it work.

I'm sure when you look back on your journey you will relate with similar stories of your own. For those in their first 10 years, it's tough (sorry for the lack of sugar coating!) they say you overestimate what you can do in 12 months but underestimate what you can do in 5 years. We have found this to be true.

When we started out we were a young couple with a 14-month-old baby and Esther earning an income from 2 days a week as a physiotherapist. We started with second hand gear and hiring most of it until we could slowly buy our own equipment. Our most valuable asset was probably the handpiece that allowed us to save a fair bit of cost shearing our own sheep.



*Early Arkley days – Shearing with Sheartech at the Domeburn run block, we could hold 1200 lambs undercover*

While we don't feel like we have "made it" (it's a continuous game with plenty more to achieve), when we look back, we have come a long way from where we started.

We want to celebrate and acknowledge those that have helped us on the farming journey that we are on. We are having a bit of a bbq in early November (date tbc) and we would love you and your family to join us and enjoy an afternoon/evening off the farm and a feed on us. It's not really about us, it's more of an excuse to have a social occasion and get off the farm.

## SHEEP BODY CONDITION SCORE APP


We have three main metrics that we keep an eye on with our livestock; pasture covers, growth rates in our finishing stock and body condition scores (BCS) in our capital stock. I like these three metrics as they are all measures that we have a reasonably high level of control over (unlike world markets, the climate or government policy).

We see BCS as a lead indicator (as opposed to a lag indicator) to the metrics that drive profitability such as, scanning percentage, lamb survival, milking ability, weaning weights and growth rates.

After trying to find a good way to record BCS and having no luck, we decided to try building our own app using AI. We currently have a test version out and are looking for people to give it a go and give us some feedback.

For someone who is an able computer user (but no expert) this process has been easier than I expected. We see AI as an exciting step forward and look forward to being able to do more things we never expected to be able to do.

There is more about this on our website <https://arkleyfarm.com/sheep-bcs-app>



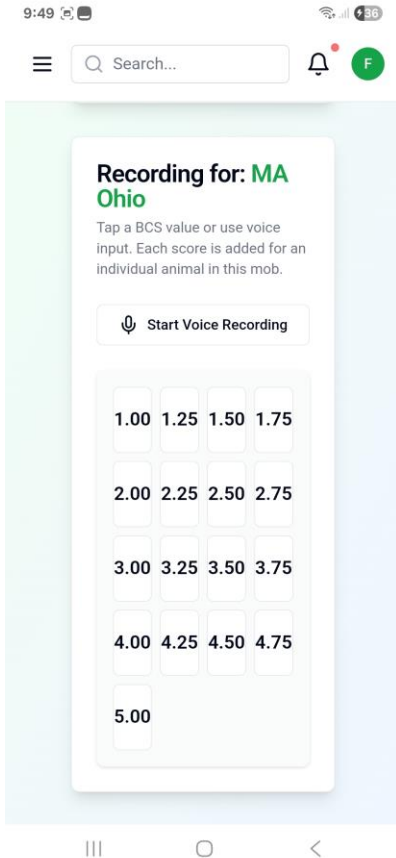
ARKLEY FARM

App Features

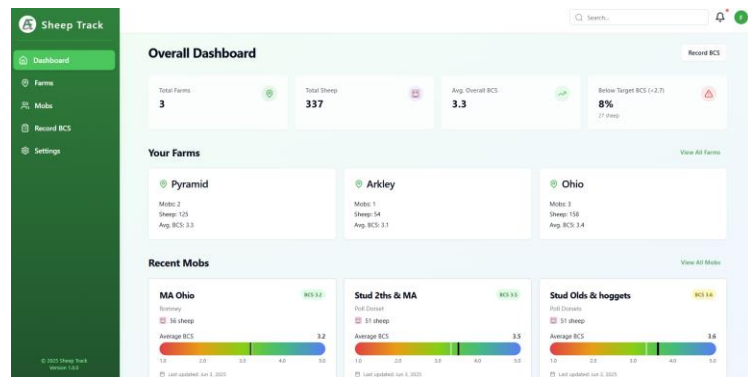
This app is in the testing phase but has the current features:

- Phone and computer friendly
- Voice or button recording of body condition scores, voice recording is very user friendly for in the sheep yards
- The ability to set targets for average as well as top and bottom limits for BCS
- The ability to look at your data at an overall business level, farm level or mob level

*Some of the features*



*The phone version for recording BCS*



*The Dashboard on the computer version on the app*

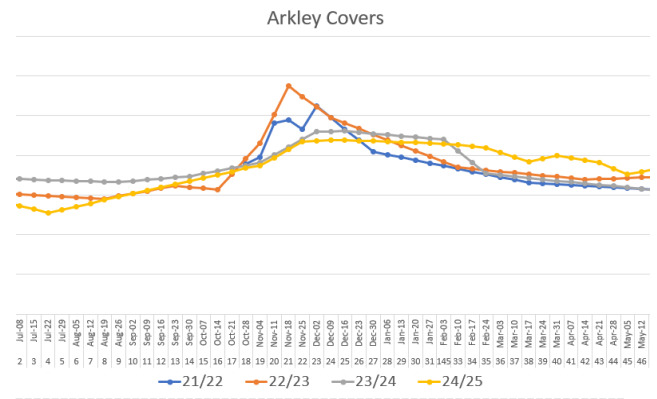
## ON THE FARM - LIVESTOCK

Once again, we weaned our lambs at 20kgCW and then we pushed them up to 23kgCW (last season 22kgCW) in February. This was a deliberate move to carry more stock through December and January without buying as many store lambs, that can often cause a feed pinch if we get dry in the autumn.

We then gradually drop our killing weights to keep our pasture cover levels where we want over autumn and into early winter with the tail enders going early June at 20-21kg. This is similar to what we did last season and we have found some good cost savings by finishing less lambs to higher weights with less expensive quarantine drench and less handpiece time!

Going forward we are using Farmax with the help of Simon Glennie from Abacus Bio to see how we can optimise the efficiency in our sheep and beef system as “the rules of the game” change eg. weight brackets at the works and the availability of store lambs (for example, when I started managing in 2007 we were buying store lambs for \$40 at 28kg and taking them to 17.3kgCW to be worth \$60).

It will be interesting to see what we learn through this process, and we welcome your input on this. I enjoy hearing how your farming systems have and are evolving over time. We have great clients of all sizes doing cool stuff on farm.



*Trying to balance pasture covers and quality and turn it into \$\$\$*



*Aaron's last harvest as a preschooler, a bit quieter at home now*

## ON THE FARM - GRAIN

Harvest and autumn seeding has been a lot more fun that last season, it's nice to be back to a more normal weather pattern.

Our cereal yield has gone fairly well which is great considering the start they had.

The peas and grass seed have struggled and the white clover was a flop, we have decided to let others keep experimenting in the clover space before we give it another go.

Our N sensors on the tractor have worked well and we have been more efficient in our Nitrogen usage as measured by Nitrogen applied vs grain yield and also our post harvest grain nutrient testing.





*Waiting to be sorted for mating*

## OBSERVATIONS OF A NEWER STUD BREEDER

In our last newsletter we mentioned that a few stud breeders that we deal with are moving on. It has allowed us a very interesting view behind the scenes into these other studs (as well as studs of other breeds that have sold), this has also helped us reflect on our own stud.

From what I've seen there are 3 things to look for in the health of a sheep stud:

1. Older rams that are used for consecutive seasons – this shows they are performing well and worth using again.
2. Younger rams surpassing their predecessors – this shows that there is progress being made.
3. Outside sires being used – this shows an open mindedness, a continual search for the best genetics and the benchmarking of their own breeding program.

I have often heard older stud sheep & cattle breeders talk about the importance of good female lines. I never fully understood this until this mating. In 2023 I assisted

Trevor with the physical assessment at mating while he did the paperwork and in 2024 & 25 we swapped jobs and I did all the paperwork research. It has showed me that the top females stand out and are very valuable.

My theory on this is that we only use the top rams from right end of the bell curve, but since we need so many more ewes, we mostly focus on culling the left side of the bell curve. Even though we focus more on culling the bottom ewes, those top end ewes on the right side of the bell curve really stand out if you search for them and they are a big part of breeding new sire rams (often multiple sires to sell or be retained).

This is why we have targeted the top females at Wharetoa and Adelong. It sounds nerdy, but their worth is so much higher than average, as breeding them takes many breeding generations and you can never have enough top females. We are excited to see how they will influence what we have to offer you going forward.

## STUD NEWS – POLL DORSET TEXEL EXPANSION

Garth & Chris Shaw at Wharetoa Genetics have had a very successful dispersal sale, we have been their main source of outside genetics for their premium terminal sire stud the Wharetoa Meatmaker (Poll Dorset Texel).

We sold them a ram lamb last season Ohio 698/23 he topped their sire summary with a NZTW of 2308 (the next best being 1736). He was also the highest priced sheep sold at the terminal dispersal sale (at a profit). After he was sold, Garth was quick to tell Trevor and I in a light-hearted manor “that he was quite a good value mating!”

We will miss Garth and Chris as the Texel ram we purchased off them Wharetoa A75/22 has gone well for us. He also topped their sire summary for their texel stud as they used him as a ram lamb.

We purchased the top 21% of their Meatmaker females at the sale buying the top pens of 4 tooth, 6 tooth and top two pens of ewe lambs. These have joined our Ohio Poll Dorset Texel 2 tooth and ewe lambs to breed stabilised Poll Dorset Texels. We will still be breeding first cross Poll Dorset Texels and look forward to the new arrivals adding to our scale and selection pressure to increase genetic gain and keep up with the demand.



*Trevor & Pete, caught shopping at Wharetoa*

## STUD NEWS – END OF AN ERA AT ADELONG & A TRIP TO AUSSIE

Neville & Dianne Greenwood of the Adelong Poll Dorset Stud south of Christchurch had a very hot dispersal sale of their adult ewes. We managed to pick up 10 very nice younger ewes and at an average of \$915/head, we had the honour (!) of having paid the highest average price. There is a lot of positivity around the Poll Dorset breed and at both sales we were the highest priced purchasers focusing on quality over quantity. It was a surprise to me how little the price dropped for the lower quality and older ewes.

The Adelong dispersal sale was a good opportunity to meet other Poll Dorset breeders from around the country. They are a good, positive group of farmers, with many looking to expand their Poll Dorset flocks.



*Neville Greenwood at the Adelong Dispersal sale*

Pete and Esther alongside 8 other couples are going on a Poll Dorset breeders trip to the Bendigo sheep show in Australia this July, which will involve a few stud visits as a group and then we will travel north east on our own to look at some more studs and also a Poll Dorset research farm where they are doing sire trials over multiple studs with a focus on production and eating quality. Hopefully we will find some genetics to bring home to Ohio.

We have had a good response from breeders over there wanting to show us around and most of them have used Ohio semen in the past which has opened doors.

## ALL THE BEST FOR THE SEASON AHEAD

We wish you all the best for the season ahead, with the price positivity in the market we believe it is key to make the most of seasons like this. This is where the investment you have made in your farms, people, fertiliser, pastures and genetics will return a good dividend. We know it's a cyclic industry and we see those that keep investing in the tough years are the ones that will be "lucky" in the seasons like this one.

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



*Ohio 234/23 at the Gore Ram Fair*

Regards,

Pete & Esther Gardyne

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