



FERNLEAF Newsletter - September 2018

Hello again to our many clients and other interested folk. Also a warm welcome to a large number of new contacts this year.

We're delighted with our progress, particularly with overcoming parasites and improving structural soundness of our sheep.

Ian is now living in Helensville with my older brother Stuart (who some of you will know) so we are having to write this newsletter with the help of email and stuff – who would have believed we would have been able to do all this 20 years ago.

Anyway, ...

Parasites

Rams - out of 150 young rams coming through this season, so far only 17 (11%) have ever been drenched once. We're delighted and very grateful for this – it has been a great season with good growth, etc, but we attribute most of it to the progress we are making with parasite resistance.

Ewes – 12% have needed a single drench so far in their short lives. We were particularly encouraged by the only 11% of ram lambs having needed a drench so far, as the rams are it is normally more of them (than ewes) need a shot of drench to keep them going – must be a 'man flu' thing – ha ha ...



Faecal egg counts - at ten months a large number of ram hoggets tested at zero and only 6 had more than 500 eggs per gram.

These are our best results ever and I believe we have really turned a corner after a long time of 'banging away' and seemingly only making slow progress.

In addition, we had no winter crop or even oats to winter the sheep on – they were entirely grass fed!!



The Fernleaf method of working towards parasite resistance

In the early days we suffered a drop in production by lifting our stocking rate to 16 SU per hectare and dramatically reducing drenching.

This approach provided maximum challenge so that we could discover the sheep that could handle the worm challenge.

We don't recommend the farmers stop drenching but we do suggest only drenching those that need it - practising 'refugia'.

So we leave the healthy sheep undrenched.

One theory behind this practice is that, by not drenching, the sheep's immune system kicks in. After all, what incentive is there for this to happen if the sheep can rely on drench to 'do the work'.

And isn't this the more humane approach – empowering our livestock to 'fight their own battles' using their God-given systems so that they can live longer and healthier lives.

A side-note – using this approach, you will also spend less money on drench and less time and effort in getting stock in for the cycles of drenching.

For the livestock that constantly need drenching to keep them going, they need to be culled / retired.

I would also recommend getting faeces tested to find out how many parasites are in your stock. Testing takes the guesswork out of the equation as some stock have resilience towards worms, which means they can do well even if they do have parasites.

The ideal is resistance – where sheep stop the parasite challenge.

It's like having an enemy army coming into the land and being able to put up with them (resilience) when it would be better to stop them at the border – resistance.

From the ground up

This year we have put on 350 kg of Dolomite which is from Nelson and is magnesium.

Our aim is to farm in a more biological way (which is what we also do with our sheep) and, to do this with our soil, we aim to help the worms and microbes so that they can consume more larvae and Faecal Eczema (FE) spores.

This idea makes sense to me and an increasing number of farmers are taking this approach seriously and even claiming no FE in the recent bad years as a result of what they have done in this regard.



Bringing on the youngins

We've also had Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre students spending considerable time out on the farm. These students have helped me take faeces samples - bet they wouldn't learn about that in too many other places. I've also been teaching them how to decide faecal consistency scores (based on moisture content and form, etc).

And they've helped with preparing for lambing, in terms of things like how to repair and stitch up bearings, weighing hoggets and fixing fences.

I've found being able to pass on my knowledge and experience very rewarding.

Structural soundness

Our decision to use Ian Walsh to help us with selection of both ewes and sires is proving to have been a sound one.

An 'expert' in the industry states that ram selection can be done by only looking at recording scheme figures. We think this is very unwise advice as many inferior animals have exceptionally good figures in terms of breeding indexes, but poor structural soundness.

What we're discovering is that the more structurally more sound sheep are more resistant to parasites (i.e. their faecal samples have lower worm counts)

It's time to start phoning those on our mailing list, in fact I'm late this year, a crook knee hasn't helped !! If you don't hear from me by later October and you do want to have a chat or more info don't hesitate to give me a call. With about 220 on our mailing list it takes a while to reach everyone .

Our policy is that if you've bought from us in the past you have priority for a choice of rams. However in most cases we can fit new clients in as gaps always happen. Farmers circumstances change and not everyone buys every year anyway... Happy Farming!

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