



Newsletter
December 2019

Wairere Merino

Join the winners



Wairere Merino rams at Beckenham, North Canterbury. See Don and Kate Anderson's story, page 2.

Breeding the dual purpose back into sheep has been a fun journey for a Romney breeder. Achieving \$40-60 per sheep from wool to go along with current lamb returns is the icing on the cake.

There has been a quiet revolution happening with some Merino ram breeders in both New Zealand and Australia. In developing our Wairere Merino Halfbred, we have made full use of the genetic improvement achieved by the Nine Mile Merino stud in faster growth rate, more muscle and more fat. That we chose the right path is reflected in some top Otago farmers buying in ewe lambs of the same breeding, but Wairere Romney rams over Merinos of Nine Mile genetics. Some of these farmers are buying Halfbred ewe lambs from Gundy Anderson, farming near Benmore. Gundy is cracking productivity records that seemed impossible just a decade ago. Using Nine Mile genetics, he has lifted his Merino flock lambing to 130%, and finishes male lambs to 19kg before the winter. Admittedly, to do this he feeds his sheep much better than traditional

Merino farmers, using a mix of lucerne, other specialist pasture mixes and fodder crops on cultivable land.

A new home

With changes at Lake McKay Station, some land being sold and a new manager, the Wairere Merino flock was shifted in July last year to Rusty Nevill's property at Moa Creek. It has been a pleasure working with Rusty. He is a dedicated sheep man. He currently has two terminal sire studs, Dorset Down and SuffTex, recorded on SIL, and sold a Border Leicester stud several years ago. Rusty is farming his 500 hectare home block, most of it irrigated, in conjunction with a 4,400 hectare lease block which bounds the home farm and rises to 900 metres above sea level on the range behind. The lease block had previously been overstocked, and eaten bare by rabbits as well. Restoring quality feed cover is a long term project, but three years down the track excellent progress has been made, helped by rabbit control work. Rusty farms Quarterbreds and Halfbreds, so is enjoying

Andrew Puddy 0800 924 7373

the comparison with the Wairere Halfbreds. He tags our lambs at birth. His familiarity with recording for SIL, and thorough culling for visual or productivity faults, combine to make Rusty an excellent stud master. The Wairere flock is run together with Rusty's commercial flock for much of the year, but not from lambing to weaning.

Some comments from Rusty, after 15 months of farming our sheep: "Your sheep are particularly good mothers. I test that strong maternal trait when I move around paddocks tagging lambs at birth. The Wairere Halfbreds are also ahead of my own sheep for growth rate. I take a hard line on any lame sheep on my property, so cull any that are lame, commercial or stud.

These Wairere Merino Halfbreds are a good product."

Experimentation

Wairere Merino still has some older Romney ewes, plus two hundred Romney ewe hoggets trucked south from Wairere this year. That will enable us to continue sampling some different Merino genetics to blend with our interbred Halfbred flock. This year we used an older, proven Earnsclough ram over half the older Romney ewes and half the ewe hoggets. We have also trialled a couple of rams from Maryburn, and from Matangi Station.

Growing the rams



The ram lambs have been grown out for sale by Sam Stevens, ten minutes down the road at Poolburn. Sam is well known in the area for his Poll Dorset ram sale, which is gaining in popularity every year. With a smaller property of 240 hectares, Sam has time to tutor students from Ranfurly High School in agriculture. Again, Wairere is fortunate to have another top farmer involved with our stock.

Where to from here?

With the changes at Lake McKay, and studmaster Jock Meehan moving to Wairere Romney country near Gore, the business had an unsettled period in 2018. With the farming side resolved, we are set to move forwards again. Despite the setback last year, we are encouraged to continue by the excellent results being achieved by some of our clients.

- David and Judy Andrews, Hyde. David bought 1,100 Wairere Merino sired capital stock ewes from Motatapu in 2017, where the decision had been made to discontinue farming with sheep. In 2017 David lambed 163%, lifting to 170% in 2018. David: "That lift in Halfbred productivity was a quantum leap compared to our other sheep. It was a no brainer to start buying Wairere Merino rams."
- Don and Kate Anderson, North Canterbury, Beckenham Hills, near Cheviot. "We've been using Wairere Merino rams since 2014, over what was a 7300 Corriedale ewe Flock. The improvement has been significant. Lambing has lifted from 110% in 2014 to 145% in 2018. Weaning weight is similar, but with more twins the total weaning weight is 32% more to sell or retain. Micron for the younger ewes has reduced from 28-28.5 to 26-26.5.

Great people and better feeding has been part of the improvement. Following a brutal three year North Canterbury drought, with rainfall ranging from 240 to 450ml, kale is grown for feeding ewes 7-10 days before mating to 7-10 days after. Regrowth is then fed to twin ewes post scanning. The ewe hoggets go onto lucerne in February. These Wairere SmartSheep have given us more potential to realise, and the bottom line has improved dramatically."

- Mark Rutherford, North Canterbury. Mark was the only client to use ram lambs as sires in our first year of Wairere Merino, so is our oldest client. Mark bought Dohne Merino/Romney rams from Wairere from 2004-2008, so has a lot of Wairere through his flock. He then was the first to buy Wairere Merino rams as ram lambs, in 2013. Mark: "We are still using Wairere halfbreds because they are easy care, low input, robust sheep. Last season we sold \$54 of wool and \$91 of lamb from 56kg ewes, and the 5yr ewes made \$193 at the Hawarden ewe fair."
- Willie Millton, Ward Marlborough. "I've bred my own version of Wairere Halfbreds. A family lease property in North Canterbury, Birch Hill, started buying Wairere Romney rams in 1991. I now put the Wairere bred ewe hoggets and five year ewes to Merino rams, and farm the first cross near Ward. I like farming fine wool sheep, and they suit this farm, which I bought in 2014. The two tooth scans 178% and the ewes 187% and tailed 140 to the ram. I sell quite a number POM, and sold some store at \$3.90 per kilo last season. I winter the smaller lambs. They weighed like lead, this spring at 23kg, and I shored \$40 of wool off them too."

Will fine wool sheep suit you?

With strong wool in the doldrums, it is natural to consider the potential for a finer wool flock on your farm. Aspects to consider:

- Romneys and other crossbred sheep usually have ewes with wool micron 36 to 40, with a small proportion clipping down to 33-34. To achieve a significantly finer micron and higher wool price will require outcrossing to a Merino. The resultant Halfbred is not as robust as the



Ewes and lambs, November 23rd 2019.



SmartSheep ewes and lambs, including some Wairere Romney ewes with first cross lambs at Moa Creek, early December 2018.

Wairere Romney. It will not enjoy mob stocking North Island hill country style, trudging around in mud and wet cold.

- Feet problems become more of an issue when fine wool sheep are taken out of their traditional South Island areas. Many South Island soil types are freer draining than North Island soils. Fifteen to twenty years ago, Wairere used Dohne Merinos over Romney ewes to breed a dual purpose Halfbred. Some lambs limped before weaning, despite using some Dohne rams with a 1:1 foot score on the Lincoln test.
- In 2006 a large North Island Station asked Wairere to breed Finn-Texel/Perendale rams. We purchased 350 five year ewes from a Perendale stud in the South Island, an area with typically dry cold and frosty winters. The ewes weighed 68kg on arrival at Wairere, after two days off feed, and scanned 180%. But then they deteriorated in both body condition and feet through our wet winter, and weaned only 105% in a year when the Wairere Romney flock weaned 150%. The lambs reared were poor, and the client Station decided that the theoretical ideal cross, and hybrid vigour, was obviously not working.
- Fine wool sheep have been tried before in the North Island. They can work on a few soil types: rocky ground, pumice, and sand. But the wave of enthusiasm usually runs out as the premium for fine wool subsides, and management issues emerge.

Having said all that, Wairere Merino does suit certain areas, and can achieve impressive productivity. The good bodied Merinos being bred now by the likes of Gordon Lucas and Jane Rive at Nine Mile and Willie and Susie McDonald provide the foundation for a higher performing Halfbred than was possible twenty years ago. Our concept of combining the strong productivity and constitution of the Wairere Romney with a robust Merino type is proving its worth.

Winners!

Brian and Anna Coogan, farming near Taihape, have won the NZ Ewe Hogget Competition this year. Brian switched to Wairere Romneys eight years ago, following a few years of using a multi breed composite. Performance had stalled at 140% and 50% POM at 17.5kg. By contrast, lambing in 2017 was 163%, 159 in 2018. And 91% of lambs went POM at 19.7kg last season, singles in December and twins in January. Hogget lambing is in the 90-100% range. Assisting this stellar performance is Brian's system of restricting all cattle to crop in late winter/early spring. That allows more room for the ewes at lambing and in early lactation. And the early sale of prime lambs frees up summer feed for replacement ewe lambs and for rising two tooth ewes recovering from hogget lambing, a virtuous system.

Impressive! Genetics create potential, but management allows that potential to become reality. Congratulations, Brian and Anna!



Brian Coogan with two tooth ewes.

Brian: "I have always enjoyed working with you and your team, and value the dedication and hard work going on behind the scenes."

Wairere clients have won three of the last seven New Zealand Ewe Hogget Competition Awards:

2013 Rob and Jean Forrester, North Canterbury, with Wairere Composites.

2017 Richard and Mary Anne Power, North Canterbury, with Wairere and Waititi Romneys.

2019 Brian and Anna Coogan, Taihape, with Wairere Romneys.

Wool

Our wool micron has measured a little stronger since shifting from Lake McKay. Perhaps it was "rabbit fine" there? The ewe clip in August this year was 26 micron, the ewe hoggets 23.7 and the ram hoggets 25.3. There was a 20-29 micron range in the side samples from ram hoggets. That's easily enough range to select stud sires to take the clip finer, but our primary focus will be on the best bodied, highest growth rate sheep. Despite the recent lift in mid micron wool price, meat earns the majority of the income.



Wairere Romney ewe hoggets mated to Merino Rams May 16th, photograph taken 25th November



Two tooth rams at Wairere, early November, 13 months old. Note the medium-fine wool type, and robust body type.

Here's wishing you a bumper lambing and high prices this season. Derek Daniell

Ram bookings for January 2020

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Mobile: _____

Email: _____

I would like to book _____ two tooth Wairere Merino rams, at \$ _____

Price brackets: \$1,650 \$1,250 \$1,000 \$800 (circle one)

Rams will be pre-selected into one of three groups:

1. High SIL index,
finer micron

2. Medium SIL index,
medium micron

3. Lower SIL index,
stronger micron

Email booking to admin@wairereram.co.nz or mail Derek Daniell, Wairere RD6 Masterton 5886 or telephone Andrew Puddy 0800 Wairere (0800 924 7373)

Contact Information:

admin@wairereram.co.nz | 021 222 5100 | Derek Daniell: derek@wairereram.co.nz | 021 751 163
Jack Meehan: jack@peterwalsh.co.nz | 027 432 4284