



# Start at the top

Take the best Romney genetics in New Zealand and mate to the best meat producing, fine wool Merinos...

## It can't be done

...was the topic of Mark Ferguson's presentation at the Wairere Merino field day at last week. Is it possible to combine high value wool with high value meat production in one sheep?

Mark came to New Zealand from Australia under contract to New Zealand Merino. His challenge? To find genetic solutions to the limiting factors in farming fine wool sheep. He organised a big trial testing 730 rams from forty studs for resistance to footrot, then moved on to advise on breeding the total package: sheep which excel in the three Rs:

## Reproduction Rapid growth Resilience

That is exactly the vision of easycare sheep that we have at Wairere Merino. We started in 2012, and have now consolidated from breeding first cross to an interbred flock.



*Wairere Romney x "Multimeat Merino", just tailed at Wannan Pastoral, Australia. Second cut of 2,000 sold at weaning, 100 days old, 29kg \$A140. Top cut went to own feedlot for February contract at \$8.50/kg carcass weight.*

The field day started with a four wheel drive tour up through 4,400 hectare Bonspiel, a lease block which Rusty Nevill has had for five years. Bonspiel has responded well to destocking, 120,000 rabbits shot, fertiliser, cultivation and pasture renewal. The tour exited via the Poolburn dam, then returned to the yards. Rusty's hogget mob had been drafted to separate 244 Wairere Merino hoggets, Rusty's Quarterbreds, some other Halfbreds and Quarterbreds. The Wairere hoggets had by far the best body type.

Sire rams were on display, also Wairere rams that Rusty is now using over his Halfbreds, and over some Merinos.



*These sires demonstrated the grunty body type which has width and depth in balance with length.*

## Derek spoke about the history of Wairere's involvement with Merinos.

That started with the purchase of Dohne rams in 2003, and five years of breeding Dohne/Waireres. "Our biggest client, Hugh Northcote of the Whalesback, loved the sheep, but couldn't get the micron on progeny below 25.

**Australia.** Meantime, from 2005 we started air freighting Romney rams to Melbourne. Waireres worked a treat over Border/Merinos, Australian composites, and Merinos. In 2015-17 Wairere bought a thousand hectares in western Victoria, and flew ewes and sire rams there. The sheep scene there is buoyant. The biggest breeder of prime lamb maternals, Tom Bull, **has averaged \$4,000 per ram lamb for the first 1,400 sold at auction this year...**

born in June/July, sold November. Average Australian lamb carcass weight was just under 24kg last year. Our Romneys excel in parts of Australia, because breeding in the Wairarapa hills for the three Rs has created a sheep which needs less supplementary feeding in summer dry or winter wet.

In 2012 Jock Meehan was managing **Lake McKay** near Wanaka for Colin Harvey. Jock persuaded the three of us to combine to form Wairere Merino. We purchased rams from Gordon Lucas and Jane Rive at Nine Mile, and bred first cross sheep. We bred Nine Mile cast for age ewes to Wairere Romneys, and 300 Wairere Romney selected for finer micron. The Romneys had a much higher lambing, at 160%, and imprinted better mothering ability on their lambs. We then started interbreeding.

We were making great progress until Jock left for an equity share in Wairere Romney country near Gore, and Colin started to sell parts of Lake McKay.

# Wairere Merino

**Breeding is a long term game**, so I didn't want to give up and sell the flock. Rusty came to the rescue for a year, then said that he was enjoying the comparison with his own Halfbreds, Quarterbreds, Merinos and Romneys (run on his home block of 510ha, two thirds irrigated). Rusty is impressed with the survivability of newborn lambs, the mothering ability of the ewes, and how well the smaller cull lambs finish at 20-21kg in the spring.

**Feedback from satisfied ram clients** was a big encouragement to continue, including endorsement from farmers in harder country, such as the Nevis. Also, I knew that some top farmers were buying Wairere Halfbred lambs from Merino farmers like Gundy Anderson.

**Andrew Herriott** started with Wairere in July 2020, and more recently has visited Wairere Merino ram clients, plus some other fine wool farmers. Now that we have a local champion, the momentum at Wairere Merino is about to accelerate".

Andrew spoke about his recent involvement, combining with Rusty to wean, cull ewes, and select ram and ewe lambs and hoggets. The ram lambs/hoggets now run at Ben Hardy's property near Roxburgh, closer to Andrew's home farm near Heriot. Ben's farm runs from 100m to 1,000 metres above sea level. He runs around one third breeding, one third grazing, and one third trading stock.

**Mark Ferguson** is well known on both sides of the Tasman. Mark designed the "Lifetime Ewe" program in Australia, set up to demonstrate the long term advantages of growing young stock well, and the productivity response to better feeding. New Zealand farmers are indeed fortunate that Mark has stayed in New Zealand. Four years ago he left NZ Merino to set up NextGenAgri, which now has five consultants in New Zealand and Australia. [mark@nextgenagri.com](mailto:mark@nextgenagri.com) 021 496 656



*Wairere Merino two tooth rams at a client's property, North Canterbury.*

We look forward to seeing you at ram selection time in early February  
Here's wishing you heavy weights and high prices this season. **Derek Daniell**



## Ram bookings for February 2022

Two tooth rams will be sold from Ben Hardy's property, 4196 State Highway 8, Roxburgh in the first week of February. For those who missed the field day, we have a ram viewing day at Ben's on Wednesday 12th January

Please scan or take a photo of booking form and email to Andrew Herriott  
[southislandsales@wairereram.co.nz](mailto:southislandsales@wairereram.co.nz) | 027 240 0231

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Price brackets:**    \$1,650    \$1,200    \$950    (circle one)

- Wairere Merino rams are bred for high lambing percentages.
- Lamb survival is enhanced by improved mothering ability from Wairere Romneys, and by a thicker skin than the average Halfbred.
- No drench to adult Wairere Merino stock at Bonspiel.
- Fast growth rate allows lambs to be sold prime before their first winter.
- The ewes clipped 24.5 micron this year, the ram hoggets 21.7, ewe hoggets 21.4.
- We take a hard line on feet issues.

## It can be done!