

Motu-nui Rams

Newsletter - September 2024



A YEAR FOR RESILIENCE, BOTH ANIMAL AND HUMAN ALIKE

We put our stud stock through greater pressure than our clients will, ensuring top performance for their flocks.

2023 has been a year of adapting to challenges at Motu-nui rams. Our first open day at Kai Tak reaffirmed that our breeding objectives are on track, with strong feedback highlighting client confidence in our rams. By continuously pushing our stud stock beyond typical farming conditions, we are committed to delivering rams that will excel in your flocks. We look forward to welcoming everyone again during the upcoming ram sale season.

- Ben and Vibeke Morrison

WORM BURDENS AND DRENCH RESISTANCE

Motu-nui have purchased worm-resistant sire rams to help in our fight against parasite burdens. Lambs sired by these worm-resistant rams have hit the ground, and we're excited to see how they shape up through to weaning.

We don't drench our adult stock, relying on an animal's natural resistance and/or resilience as a selection tool to select replacements from as well as cull those that don't meet our standard. We also don't drench our ram lambs and ewe lambs from February to May and graze them on low pasture covers. This allows us to see what young stock can handle the high worm pressure from the start. Moving forward, we'll be looking to monitor worm burdens throughout the year, quantifying the average burden carried in our stud stock.



Ram lambs in April post-cull

FROM PRESSURE TO PERFORMANCE

I think us as farmers are showing our resilient nature, making it through whatever curveballs the last government threw our way. We kept chipping away, and with interest rates dropping and the market picking up, it seems we may be through to the other side, with the outlook being extremely positive.

The stud ewes have been put through a harsh 12-months, with high worm pressure and low feed availability putting them to the test. Pressures like these, especially in our 2-th flock, allow us to see how well every animal tolerates the pressure. Those that don't cut the mustard are culled, plain and simple. Only the toughest survive, and the best of those thrive. It's these 2-ths we retain, and breed from, keeping the flow of high-quality ewes into our mixed-age flock. Feed pressure is one aspect we want to investigate moving forward, and we'll look to compare ewe performance and feed availability, looking to see how many kilograms of lamb each ewe weans per kilogram of feed she's provided with.

Breeding from the toughest ewes ensures our flock is always improving, especially under tough feed and worm pressures.

A major thought on everyone's mind now, including ours, is drench resistance. Unfortunately, drench resistance is a developing issue that isn't going to go away anytime soon. We don't rely on drenching to keep our rams performing as well as they are and have recently added some worm-resistant rams to keep improving our performance.

Lambs sired by these worm-resistant rams will be hitting the ground this year, and it is exciting to not only see how they perform but also use this resistance to continue to build on the strong performing traits our sheep have.

- Ben

MOTU-NUI DATA

While breeding a hardy flock that tolerate high worm pressure and low feed availability helps us form a solid structure come tupping time, it is only the first half of the puzzle. At the end of the day, the income earner for us is the weight of lamb weaned and is a product of several variables starting at conception rates, flowing through to scanning percentages, lambing percentages and finally lamb growth rates.



Crossbreds in mid-November

Comparision of average lamb weaning weights (WWT) at 90 days: 2022 vs 2023

MOTU-NUI CROSSBRED STUD EWES			
Class	**Sex**	**2023**	**2022**
2-th	Ram	33.2kg	34kg
2-th	Ewe	29.7kg	29kg
MA	Ram	35.4kg	36kg
MA	Ewe	31.7kg	33kg

MOTU-NUI ROMNEY STUD EWES			
Class	**Sex**	**2023**	**2022**
2-th	Ram	31.3kg	32kg
2-th	Ewe	28.3kg	29kg
MA	Ram	32.8kg	34kg
MA	Ewe	30kg	31kg

Targeting high lamb weaning weights is one of our key breeding objectives, with the goal of weaning a greater proportion of lambs straight onto the truck. This helps us capitalise on early-season lamb schedules, free up feed for other stock classes and push to get as many lambs finished before the summer dry kicks in. To further examine how our lamb performance ranks, we're looking to measure the amount of feed available to our stud stock and quantify lamb output by feed consumed. We believe we run our stock hard, yet they still perform and want the data to back this up.

FROM CONCEPTION RATES TO LAMB GROWTH, EVERY VARIABLE COUNTS TOWARD ACHIEVING HIGHER LAMB WEANING WEIGHTS AND STRONGER RESULTS.



Ewe lambs at weaning in December

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

Looking from the outside and feeling the current mood I get the feel of frustration. Most, if not all the current issues we are facing are totally out of the control of farmers. Not wanting to wade into a political debate but our previous government has dug a large hole that as an industry, we must keep digging out of. Throw in a challenging season, increasing costs and the continued financial impact of the damaging cyclone, it's no surprise to see a down beat mood.

It's a matter of continuing to do the basic things well and we will all eventually make it out the other side. There are many positives to hang onto. I really do feel we have hit the bottom and are on the up. Competition for land is reducing the global supply of red meat, and global sheep numbers are falling, just in NZ alone we have seen 1 million sheep exit the industry. The ongoing free trade negotiations with a change of government will speed this process up. The New Zealand dollar is depreciating along with lowering of interest rates will further increase farm gate prices. We are in for some good years ahead I am positive of that.

I continue to be extremely impressed with the transition of our ewes to Ben's farm, KaiTak. The pressure he has put them under and the performance he is achieving is very impressive. He continues to focus on a hardy structure and culling hard on poor performance. I am really enjoying our tripping around catching up with clients and seeing his passion for wanting to breed a better sheep. I look forward to catching up with you all in November for ram sales.

- Jason

Most of the issues we're facing are out of our control, but by doing the basics well, we will all make it out the other side.

BOOSTING FLOCK IMMUNITY

Breeding for FE tolerance is the best approach to reducing the impact of facial eczema, and our FE rams are proving to strengthen flock resistance.



FIGHTING FACIAL ECZEMA

One of the exciting opportunities we have sunk our teeth into at Motu-nui is breeding FE tolerant rams. Unfortunately, facial eczema is becoming more prevalent around the country and has significant impacts for production, with Beef and Lamb NZ stating FE can reduce ewe lifetime performance by up to 25%. Breeding for FE tolerant sheep is the first and best approach to reducing the impact of FE on your flock. Introducing an FE tolerant ram, such as our FE Crossbred or FE Romney rams before selecting replacements that perform the best will significantly help reduce the impact of FE and help lift your flocks FE tolerance.

At Motu-nui, we use FE tolerant stud sires to introduce tolerance to our flock, and dose a select number of that stud sire's offspring with FE product, recording the pre- and post-treatment liver function to examine tolerance. The results from the 2022 FE treatments were extremely exciting and allows us to dose our 2023 rams with a higher dosage, to further test their FE tolerance.

Left: *FE testing 2023*

SEASONAL OUTLOOK

As we move into spring, the grass is starting to take off, and with plenty of hungry mouths to feed, it's an exciting time. NIWA's forecast suggests a promising season ahead with favourable conditions for growth, giving us the hope of a strong spring flush and heavy lambs at weaning. Our ewes, well-adapted to low pasture covers, could see significant weight gains if these conditions hold.

On a positive note, interest rates are falling, and Beef and Lamb NZ predict inflationary pressures will slowly ease, providing much-needed relief for farmers.

KAI TAK OPEN DAY

YOU ASKED, WE DELIVERED

We hosted a farm open day in late 2023, providing current and prospective clients alike the opportunity to take a drive around Kai Tak, check out the rams ahead of sale time, and experience firsthand the conditions our stud mob endures. This open day was a great success with a big turnout and the weather playing into our hands. We asked those that attended what they want to see from their ram breeder and there was one piece of feedback that stood out.

"We want to see our ram breeder put their stud stock and rams under a much higher level of pressure than will, so when we buy rams, we know both ram and progeny alike are going to perform."

In response, we've been implementing quantifiable ways to demonstrate this, such as through worm counts, dry matter analysis, and FE testing, ensuring our rams can truly perform under stress.



Open day 2023



Ben discussing Motu-nui's history, breeding objectives and staff



Looking through the set stocked ewes



Cruising around Kai Tak

If you missed this open day, but want to come check out Kai Tak, meet the team and see the stud flock ahead of ram sales, feel free to reach out via our website, or give Ben a call.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD FOR WOOL!?

Moving into the 24/25 wool season, we have started on a 5-year high. Good start, but still not enough for this highly sustainable, natural, healthy fibre. What is wool's future going forward?

Well, let's start with the fact that consumers are thinking harder about what they are putting in their homes and on their bodies. At the end of the last season, wool carpet sales in this country alone had risen to 25% of sales and are still rising. Crossbred-based woolen jerseys are riding a wave of popularity, with some big brands opting for a woolen range of clothing. Wools of New Zealand carpet tiles are being put into offices and banks around the country, and moves to take them to the world are underway.

Worldwide demand is increasing, and world supply is at an all time low, good old supply and demand. With this all going on, one would think that the price can only go one way, and that's up.

Looking forward to what else is going on in the background, the NFX (natural fibre exchange) is about to go global.

What does this mean to a grower? We are looking to offer container loads of wool direct to worldwide manufacturers and will soon be putting together our first offering to test the waters. To the grower, this is a more direct way to market wool to the world, cutting out at least a couple of sets of hands along the way.

Deconstruction of fibre! A machine has been invented that can deconstruct wool from a fibre to powder form. This would give wool so many more uses over and above what we can currently do with it. The hurdle we are facing here is the money it would take to commercialise a machine big enough to push out large volumes, but all the same, it is an exciting time to think that the uses of wool going forward are almost endless.

So, what does the future hold? I think it's looking the brightest it has been in years, and to those who have stuck with it, let's hope that we can enjoy the fruits of this wonderful fibre once again. Hang in there, team; at least you know how your breed performs.

- Roger Hale

CLIENT TESTIMONIAL

"We have had a working relationship with Motu-nui Rams for over 20 years. Motu-nui supplies Bramerton in the Wairarapa and TeTuhi in Taupo with breeding rams for our two farming operations. We have always been impressed with the genetics of the flock and the survivability, durability, and hardiness. We would like to thank Motu-nui for all their hard work getting their sheep to such a high standard."

- Paul Phillips



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