***Newsletter 2009***

What an awesome spring we’re experiencing so far!

No sooner have I penned this and typically Murphy has made it start to snow – oops! – I should know better!

We’re currently tagging lambs at birth flat out and what a real joy it is to see lambs hit the deck without getting covered in mud, instead just lapping up the sunshine. Triplet survival on the flats has been phenomenal to date, with 40 years of intensive selection for mothering ability really shining through.

However, the last 12-18 months for most have been anything but easy, in fact challenging on all fronts.

Our approach tackling the drought last year was somewhat unconventional. We decided not to de-stock but instead backed our genetics to “hang tough” and shifted our mating date back nearly one month to the 10 May to help the cause.

This meant our capital stock numbers were intact, lambs produced weren’t significantly back, just younger at weaning.

It did make for a pretty stressful winter, with lightish ewes and a winter rotation that was more about a change of scenery than any substantial feed change. However, we’re satisfied we made the right decision with our genetics allowing us this option.

Fifteen years ago I wrote an article published in the Country Wide paper. The guts of the article was, the direction most sheep breeders were taking at the time was not serving the best interests of their clients or the sheep industry in general. Effectively, the point I was highlighting was that 95% of breeders were farming and selecting their stud animals in an ad lib feeding environment and then expecting them to breed daughters that cope in a typically commercial environment. Fifteen years on, this is still happening and the consequence for some had been all to obvious this last eighteen months.

“The chickens really did come home to roost” as predicted.

**CARTHEW GENETICS – OUR POINT OF DIFFERENCE**

I’m often asked what makes us different – these are our points of difference I believe:

* Efficiency. Breeding for efficiency has been our main focus at Turnberry. How efficiently every blade of grass on your property is converted into kilograms of meat and wool, ultimately determines how profitable you are!
* All our sheep are fully recorded, with full ancestry information on both dams and sires going back to 1967 with our Coopworths, 1989 with Landcorp Lamb Supreme and 2002 with Suffolk Supreme
* Commercially driven not Stud driven since 1967. Our recorded sheep receive no preferential treatment. They are farmed, performance recorded and selected in a typically commercial environment with high stocking rates, large mob sizes, steep hills and a wet, cold Wairarapa climate
* Low inputs – with a particular emphasis on minimal drenching, ie. worm resilience. Ram hoggets in particular will receive high exposure to worms with a minimal drench regime and then selected accordingly. This is extremely hard on their immune systems but the constitution and longevity of the superior rams daughters, I believe, has really vindicated this breeding decision. For the last 3 years we have also moved decisively into worm resistance aiming to reduce most of the contamination by eliminating the bottom 10% of animals that are doing 50% of contaminating.
* Constitution and structural soundness. We’ve resisted the temptation to compromise on this. We now find it extremely difficult to source outside sires that have adhered to the same criteria. Muscle scanning and visually selecting animals that are robust and not big and rangey has resulted in the type of sheep that “hacks it” on the hills and has the ability to bounce back after tough times.
* Longevity & survival. Again, our tough selection criteria encourages this. Backed up with selection for mothering ability, sires particularly good for lamb survival and some selective mating of older elite ewes.
* Landcorp Lamb Supreme – white faced terminal sires that have been developed by Landcorp with no expense spared to maximise carcass productivity. We’re the only breeders outside Landcorp that have these sheep. There’s no better Terminal sire to compliment our Coopworths.
* Suffolk Supreme – a black face alternative developed by us utilising the best Suffolk & Lamb Supreme available. This year’s cross will be ¾ Suffolk, which will give us more “marking” ability of the sires.

**“Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way”** (Booker Taliaferio Washington)

**CARTHEW GENETICS – WHERE TO FROM HERE?**

As most of you are aware, Pascale and I decided to put “Turnberry” up for sale last year with the aim of relocating to another similar property on the west side.

Not an easy decision, particularly for Mum and Dad, however, we had reached a point where we needed a change, and a new challenge.

We did sell Turnberry a couple of months ago, take over end of January 2010.

So, it’s all go now, looking at different farming options. We’re looking at properties, but also open to leases or even maybe relocating the stud into an existing operation with the right person and property. Obviously time is closing in on us, but change is always good and necessary if you want to keep ahead of the bunch.

Talking about ahead of the bunch: Royden and Kate Cooper, longstanding Carthew Genetics clients, won the “Tararua Farmer of the Year 2009” award – congratulations - well done!

Finally, I hope this finds everyone in good health, with a lot more “positives” stacked up than has been the case in the last couple of years.

Warm Regards from the Carthew team and really look forward to seeing you in December at Ram selling!