



# THE SOUTHERN STAR

News and Information for Lone Star Farms

December 2014



## IN BRIEF By Tom Sturgess

“Things are coming together for the current season; all the emphasis on condition scoring (and yeah, the odd bit of Androvax too) is bearing fruit. Look for more of the same this year; covers are good, the lamb crop’s a big one, and product prices are at least adequate.

My swing through the south was gratifying. The blocks all looked a picture and I was delighted with the professionalism and quietly capable attitude on display.

We are quite intrigued by the fodder beet potential

and will be investigating it rigorously. And certainly we will be increasing our review of pasture quality, condition and opportunity.

Whilst I am actively engaged on the Board of the Red Meat Profit Partnership and as interested as the next joker about the machinations of the big processors, I am most excited about the opportunities on our farms to profitably and sustainably improve our business. I remain confident in our future.

Thanks to you and your families for your continuing hard work and dedication.



## GM Update By Boyd Macdonald

Interesting times ahead! Commodity prices look stable at manageable levels, with beef particularly strong and sheep solid without being spectacular, dairy being the exception after a very strong run. The two big meat processing co-ops see both CEO’s resigning although for what looks like very different reasons. Plus a

season that is on a knife edge that may turn out to be great or may go dry a little too early.

On farm to date we have enjoyed what will probably be a record lambing (final numbers still coming in) across the company, well done to all farm staff. These results don’t just happen. Yes it may have been a kind lambing season with few storms leading to high survival rates, but the lambs have to be in the ewes from the start to give the opportunity of a good result. It all started at weaning last year with condition scoring and preferentially feeding the ewes that needed to be brought up to the necessary condition to ovulate well at tupping. All on farm staff needed to know what was expected and what was trying to be achieved. Farm staff all knew the target and why, what and how! In other words “the Plan”! All this has flowed through to stock being set stocked in great order and lactating well. All the teams can be proud of their achievements this season, the Barewood team deserving a special mention for also getting winter lambs through with very tight feed supply meaning precise feed and stock management was required.

With the season evenly poised at present, some farms receiving good rains and others “hanging out” for a good shower, one thing doesn’t change and that is the

need for good information and systems to help make timely decisions. We have recently employed a full time Technician to collect, use and guide us in the area of pasture mass and growth, soil moisture and temperature, long term information on rainfall data in conjunction with predicted and forecasted rainfall. This information along with our manager’s intuition will help us make the calls we need to in a timely manner. Welcome to the team Milan.

It’s all about the “People”, never has a truer word been spoken. Where are all the 50,000 extra farm staff that the industry are going to need to double exports by 2025 going to come from? We are all just waking up to the enormity of this situation and there is no easy or quick fix. There are plenty of good young people out there who are keen to give agriculture a go. We all need to work out how we can incorporate these young people into our businesses and give them the opportunity and training they deserve. This is definitely one of our biggest challenges as an industry that we need to face up to. Kellie has joined us to carry on the good work initiated by Melonie in the wide ranging HR field.

Lone Star Farms has initiated a scholarship at Lincoln University for Diploma students to study Farm Management. This year we will closely follow the progress of Matthew Ross from Wairoa and Victoria Baker from Blackmount as they study for their Farm Management Diploma and look forward to providing a work opportunity for them. We have also been working closely with Taratahi and have employed two graduating students.

I would like to wish all our staff, suppliers, customers, partners and their families a wonderful Christmas and some quality time together with families and friends.

# UPDATES FROM FARM MANAGERS

## BAREWOOD STATION, MARTY DEANS

### 6,420 HECTARES IN EAST OTAGO

Only 500mm of rain falls on Barewood most years but the flock can still crack 150% lambing (in the early mob this year) and profitably trade winter lambs. Farm manager Marty Deans has focused on improving the ability to alter stocking rates when required through changing stock policies. This has paid dividends with better performance of the stock on hand and more profitable allocation of feed. His team of seven fulltime staff have focused on putting these feeding plans into action.

A highlight for the year for Marty was seeing staff put together a plan to take 2,500 store lambs through winter and then successfully manage feed to get them through. Carry-over store lambs were finished to a 22kg carcass weight average on ryecorn, brassica and turnips.

“Staff were determined to make it work and made some great income for the business. They really thought it out for themselves,” Marty said.

Barewood runs 19,500 Romney/Texel-cross ewes with Finn genes (via Headwaters genetics). Unlike the previous cold winter, the 2014 winter was milder and only 120 days of supplements were fed. Scanning was good, not a record, but ewes averaged 172% and two-tooths 165%. Marty was pleased that only five percent of the flock ewes had a condition score under three.

Matching demand to feed supplies has been improved by dropping ewe numbers by 4,000 and running a B mob of poorer types which can be sold at any stage.

This season feed supplies are good so ewes are likely to be kept on. Barewood no longer runs breeding cows relying on store stock from Mt Albert which is geared towards breeding.

There have been several staff changes. Blair Thwaites is the new Stock Manager and Julie Graham has been appointed as fulltime Shepherd to join Pete, Dougie, Daniel and Wayne. Shepherd Daniel Adam (Herb) won a place in the Otago Country Under-20s rugby team. Three staff training days were held during the year in conjunction with the three other southern stations. Topics included feed budgeting, condition scoring, helicopter safety, knife preparation and slaughter best practice, fire safety and using electronic scales.

The focus for summer is pasture quality as covers are building (currently 1350kg DM/ha). 360 rising-one cattle have been brought in to keep pasture quality. The silage pits are empty and Marty is aiming to put two years worth of lucerne and lucerne/fescue silage into the pits this summer.



## CABERFEIDH STATION ANDREW HARDING

### 6,000 HECTARES IN THE HAKATARAMEA VALLEY

It's been a year for improving stock water, fences and staff accommodation. Extending the piped stock water supply has continued with 150 troughs being installed over 1,400 hectares (ha) on the Broadacres part of Caberfeidh.

"The difference is huge" said Farm Manager Andrew Harding. Cattle can now be run here, subdivision can start and more pasture can be utilised. Troughs are located every five to ten hectares and bring clean reliable water to 80% of the 6,000ha farm. The sheep yards at Taramea have been upgraded and the woolshed increased to a four-stand. Staff houses have been improved and old fence lines replaced.

Fodder beet crops were planted for the first time on Andrew's watch and he said the crop will change the way that Caberfeidh is run.

"We can finish more cattle over winter and grow them better so a fifteen to eighteen month finishing target is now possible."

Andrew credits Simon Johnston and Hamish Andreassend for a great job of monitoring the crop. The ten ha crop produced 24.5 tonnes DM/ha and fattened 98 rising-two steers for 80 days and 145 rising-one steers. The former grew at 840 grams/head/day

and the later 800g. Next season 30ha will be sown for cattle and sheep.

The experiment of lambing ewes with triplets in their own mobs worked well and has been repeated. The 800 triplet ewes were lightly stocked and had better access to feed. Once again Androvax has been given to all maternal sire mixed age ewes and two-tooths. The maternal mixed age ewes scanned 190%. The poorer type ewes went to a terminal sire ram and scanned 163% which was excellent. Two-tooth in-lamb results were disappointing this year despite looking the best ever and being tugged on lucerne. Andrew said he is still to get to the bottom of why they only scanned 134%.

The highlight for the year was to only have 800 out of the 16,000 ewes under condition score three at tugging. Ewes were condition scored three times from weaning to mating with the light ewes separated and moved to the terminal mob.

"The guys did a great job."

Simon, Hamish and Stu have been joined by Jo McNally as Fencer General and Experienced Shepherds Deon Gray and Jason Sutherland. Blake Patterson has been appointed as Irrigation General.



# HADLEIGH, DAN JAMES

## 1,496 HECTARES NEAR MASTERTON

The 2012 drought is well and truly behind Hadleigh ewes. Scanning was up from 155% last season to 170% for ewes and two-tooths combined. Final lambing percentage was 134% up from 122%. Farm manager Dan James said this has been a real highlight.

“I’m over the moon about it and there is still upside on this result.”

Animal health is the ongoing challenge. A faecal egg count reduction test has shown that resistance to anthelmintics is present. This makes this drench family less effective.

Having the information means Dan will change management. Ewe numbers will be dropped from 7,200 to 6,500 and more trading cattle bought in to clean up pastures. Having trading stock will have the added benefit of creating a more flexible stocking system. The aim is to have a 70:30 sheep/cattle ratio, which is more in tune with district averages.

Treble combination drenches are being used to get a better kill. Capsules are only used in lambing hoggets and in tandem with an exit drench at the end of the capsule effectiveness period. Zolvix is being used as a quarantine drench for any stock brought on to the farm. Dan has developed this strategy with help from PGG Wrightson veterinarian, Andrew Dowling.

“At least we know what we are dealing with and can make informed decisions.”

More lambs will leave the property at weaning time. Typically only 15% of lambs are sold prime at weaning although weaning is early, at 90 days of age. Lambing starts September 10th and weaning December 1st. The weaning strategy this year will depend on the store market and whether lambs are to be shipped to southern Lone Star Farms.

“We are aiming to have all trading lambs gone at weaning, only keeping on replacement ewe lambs.”

Lime is being applied at one tonne/hectare. Two hundred hectares (ha) were dressed last autumn with 600ha to be done this spring/summer. The plan is to lift pH to 5.8, most paddocks are around the 5.6 mark but some pastures are as low as 5.4

“It should have a flow on effect on animal performance.”

Confirmation of BVD in the cattle herd in August has explained the small increase in wet/dry cows. A heifer vaccination programme was already in place. Testing has started on all replacement heifers to identify any PI animals (carriers of BVD) which will be culled, there was one identified this year. The older cow’s natural immunity should be high now to avoid any problems.

Two staff currently help Dan. Brent Brown is Head Shepherd and James Matiaha started in June as General Hand, a new position. A second year cadet will be taken on from Taratahi Agricultural Training Centre in January 2015 as part of a new relationship Lone Star Farms has with the school.

“We will train them up then send them to our southern farms for experience.”

# THE WANDLE, STEPHEN JOHNSTON

## 2,272 HECTARES IN MIDDLEMARCH, OTAGO

More ewes, fewer dairy heifers and a focus on lamb finishing is the big picture strategy for The Wandle. Overseeing the changes is new Farm Manager Stephen Johnston, who stepped up from his former 2IC role in June. Stephen has been at The Wandle for around 20 months and said getting through the winter workload was a challenge with a staff member down.

“But the staff we had stepped up to the mark and showed initiative which was great.”

The 4,500 winter trading lambs purchased in May were almost to killable weights and being finished on brassica. The winter had been mild and supplementary feed was fed up to the end of August.

“We are in a pretty good space.”

Irrigation started late October and this will be the second full season with 600 hectares (ha) under irrigation. The cattle policy of running a 200 cow herd has remained unchanged. Progeny are finished by 18 months at 550kg to 590kg live weight. Cows and calves are used to control rank pasture following ewes with lambs. As a result calf growth is compromised so calves are pushed along after weaning and during their first winter through feeding ryecorn and silage. Stephen targets 650 grams/head/day through the winter and 1kg/day through spring, summer and autumn until they are killed.

“We finished most at eighteen months, only overwintering sixty rising-two year olds.”

Extra trading cattle (350 rising-one year steers and heifers) were purchased in September. Dairy heifers

return \$10/week with some earning a bonus payment. Numbers will be dropped next winter from 350 to 200.

“May to May doesn’t really suit as we need to feed our capital stock in the shoulders of the season.”

Ewe numbers lifted from 2,000 to 5,000 through buying ewes from inside and outside the group. Hoggets were not mated and the plan is to buy annual draft ewes from Barewood each year to make up numbers. Stephen said “scanning was back a little but we still tailed 148%”.

Pasture renewal includes 83ha of brassica under the main pivot being sown down into ryegrass, red and white clover and plantain. Clovers had a hard time last summer from clover root weevil attack, with clover pretty much non-existent in late summer. A large number of parasitic wasps were released so Stephen is hoping this will help. Staff worked Labour weekend bringing in mobs for tailing. A tailing team made up of Strath Tairei School parents tailed 7,000 or so lambs as a school fundraiser.

“This is great for us and we get through the lambs with two sets of yards and three cradles.”

Janine Wing has moved into the Experienced Shepherd role, while Angel-Lee Wood has been employed in the Shepherd’s role since July. Jon McClean and Cody Beck have left to go dairy farming. Massey University student Amy Holland will return for summer K-line irrigation shifts. Doug Howell, who usually works at Barewood, was a great help over the winter.



# RAINBOW STATION, JUSTIN THOMPSON

## 8,300 HECTARES INLAND MARLBOROUGH

The road through Rainbow Station was once a busy stock droving route. Farm Manager Justin Thompson doesn't have to worry about travelling mobs eating out the river pastures on his watch but recognises the flats' importance to the Station's operation. The 2500 hectares (ha) of alluvial soils is the most productive on this mainly leasehold property closely followed by the lower hill. Together they carry all 6,300 Perendale ewes and all young sheep and cattle. The balance (5800ha) is known as The Run and carries 350 mixed age cows. That's about 16ha for each cow and gives an idea of the production limits on the hard parts of Rainbow and Raglan. The high points reach into beech forest and shingle.

Justin ensured all summer crops were planted before Christmas and was rewarded with a better yield than last year. An area of rape helped boost the summer feed supply and more lambs were finished then the rape was grazed again by cattle over the winter.

"We had leafy short pasture and extra crop that allowed us to hold onto more lambs."

During winter the aged pine tree shelter belts on the flats were removed. They will be replanted next winter once the stumps are burnt out. "The windbreaks were old and damaging fences so they had to go," he said. Justin was pleased that the timber price spike coincided nicely with the sale of Rainbow timber. A new water scheme has been installed allowing some of the larger paddocks to be subdivided.

The main cattle yards are having a facelift. They are still a straight-run system but some of the pens have been widened. The weigh crate and head bail have been shifted to allow for a three way draft. The hard rock base is now exposed. Boyd, Justin and the fencing contractor worked on the design together.

"The old yards had aged timber which was a safety issue and didn't flow very well, plus twelve inches of mud wasn't fun to work in."

This autumn lighter cows were drafted off, taken off the harder run country and spread through the river country. This priority feeding of the lighter cows has paid big dividends with an impressive in-calf rate of 95% for the mixed age cows. The yearling heifers also achieved a good in-calf rate (92%). They are run on the Raglan until they have had a second calf. Once pregnancy tested they are moved to The Run. Three Hereford bulls bought from three different studs will see an injection of Hereford blood with the aim of running an Angus-Hereford cross cow. Justin has tailed the Raglan mob and the Rainbow mob will be tailed by a contract gang early November.

A focus for the year has been supporting Trevor Lloyd (Senior Shepherd).

"We are really looking forward to him being back at work and making a full recovery."

Shepherd Josh Boyack (from Taihape) has been a great help along with Tractor Driver/General/Shepherd Kevin Keehan. A semi-permanent casual shepherd, Roger Bruce has helped at busy times. Staff had a mid-winter Christmas fishing trip to Kaikoura which was lots of fun even though the fish were a bit shy.

## MT ALBERT STATION, SCOTT PATERSON

### 12,500 HECTARES AT THE HEAD OF LAKE WANAKA

Ewe condition leading into tupping was the highlight this year for farm manager Scott Paterson. Around 95% of the mob were body condition score three (out of five) or higher at tupping. This underpinned a cracking pregnancy scanning result of 174% (including two-tooths). Two-tooths were an impressive seven percent up on last season.

“We took out tail-end ewes at weaning and preferentially fed them to get them up to a score of above three. From there we reviewed all ewes every six weeks, preferential feeding any ewe under three.”

The high country station is still on the market. Scott said this means the focus is medium term and that any development has to show a high early return. Fencing is continuing to increase pasture utilisation and makes cow management easier. Dray Point was fenced this year and it now acts like a holding paddock. Fencing off the Craigieburn is the focus for this season.

The cattle policy has been tweaked with all heifer

calves being retained to be put to the bull. More trading cattle were bought in (350 rising-two year heifers and steers compared to 200 purchased the year before). Having extra cattle on board over summer really helped pasture quality and lamb growth rates were better as a result. More lambs were finished prime this year with 80% finished compared to 70% the year before.

A lovely run of weather in August/September (32 days without rain) made for a pleasant start to spring. In a two and a half metre rainfall this is a rarity. The brassica crops grew right through winter allowing for an extra grazing. This November they will be sown into grass. Scott will try sowing fodder beet this spring with the aim to grow a higher yield on a smaller area.

The two fulltime staff working with Scott are Paul Campbell (Experienced Shepherd) and Martin George (due to start as Shepherd in November). A social get together is planned for Christmas time probably a meal out in the ‘big smoke’ of Wanaka.



# PUPONGA AND QUARTZ RANGE, DARRYL HEAPS

## 1,100 HECTARES IN GOLDEN BAY

Having the two Tasman properties under the control of one Farm Manager is helping make the most of both farms. Darryl Heaps has been running the two farms separated by a fifty minute drive, since August 2013.

“The beauty is that under one manager you can make decisions straight away while with two it took time to identify and organise stock transfers depending on feed and climate conditions.”

Puponga is now the designated home of the breeding cows and the main ewe flock to breed replacements. Sheep struggle in the high rainfall at Quartz Range so the Perendale flock there is now all put to terminal rams (South Down and SuffTex). Ewe numbers have dropped from 2,500 to 1,950.

Puponga is now used to generate replacements with double the number of hoggets put to the ram this year (1,200 mated with 107% scanning result).

Quartz Range runs trading cattle as these lighter animals don't impact on the heavy, high rainfall soils as much as cows. The 108 trading cattle are set-stocked over the farm rather than break-fed. This is better for both pasture control, reducing pugging and means less supplementary feeding. Puponga runs breeding cows, keeping females as replacements and the weaner steers go to Quartz Range.

Puponga achieves flexibility in the system from having

more trading lambs on board. This season Darryl is expecting to finish all homebred lambs plus another 2,850 store lambs over both properties.

“Dropping ewe numbers has freed up feed for store lambs to be fattened.”

The highlight for this season has been a big lift in lamb survival. Darryl puts this down to selling the trading lambs earlier which allowed lower ewe stocking rates during lambing (from 10 ewes/ha to 5/ha. There was less competition for the sheltered spots and the feed. Lambing results were 131% at Quartz Range, up from 117%, he said.

Puponga ewes made 151% and two-tooth's 130%. This overall result of 145% was the best ever.

New Experienced Shepherd General, Shane Ricketts starts in December as Ben Cook has left going to a Stock Manager's job. Clinton Fearn is the Block Manager at Quartz Range. Darryl said staff were all involved in making the policy changes using the SPADE method. They sat down initially in September 2013 and looked at the Situation, Problem, Alternatives, Decision and Execution.

“We continue to review these stocking policies regularly and implement changes as required.”

“What we worked out has all fallen into place which is great.”

