



UNLOCKING THE
PERFECT SHEEP^(S)



BRED WELL, FED WELL A WINNING COMBINATION AT CHARLES HOPE

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MARK AND LIZ HUTTON are on a mission to transform the profitability of their 1,700 hectare Northern Otago farm. A change to fine-wool sheep, and better feeding through an expansion in lucerne and specialty forages, is proving to be a formula for success.

The Huttons own and manage the family farm, Charles Hope, near the Danseys Pass. Traditionally a strong wool property, Mark and Liz were keen to give fine-wool sheep a go, having enjoyed running fine-wool sheep on various properties prior to returning home 12 years ago.

Initiating the transition in 2013, they tried several finer-wool options before settling on the quarterbred as their breed of choice. In 2014, with assistance from The New Zealand Merino Company (NZM)¹, the Huttons artificially inseminated 200 halfbred ewes using Merino rams suited to the environment and production aims at Charles Hope. NZM staff assisted with measuring the progeny at key times, helping the Huttons track their progress.

To give the new fine-wool genetics the best chance of success, a forage development programme has been initiated on 200 hectares of arable country. A two-stage programme is in place, sowing fodderbeet in the first year to provide high-energy feed through the winter, which is replaced



Mark and Liz Hutton with their three children James, Lochy and Mary.

by lucerne the next spring. Currently 25 hectares is in fodderbeet and 47 hectares in lucerne. Over the next five years, the plan is to extend this system over the rest of the arable land on the property to provide the Huttons with more options for both their breeding and finishing systems.

The combined approach of new fine-wool genetics and high quality forage is already paying dividends at Charles Hope. Mark says that the “wool cheque has trebled compared to what it was three or four years ago”. They are able to maximise returns from lamb as well by finishing them on the property

in February and March, rather than putting themselves at the mercy of the flooded store market.

Mark has been especially impressed by the fodderbeet, which produced 22 tonnes per hectare last winter (in what was a particularly dry season for Charles Hope), far outperforming alternatives tried in the past. Equally impressive has been the difference that lucerne has made in the summer months, when traditional pastures have typically dried off.

Mark has found that “with better feeding, there has been a big change in the ewes – their condition score and



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weight at mating – it's vastly improved." By improving ewe body condition throughout the year, particularly leading into mating, conception and lamb survival rates have been very positive in the fine-wool flock. Already, Mark and Liz are weaning 115% in the quarterbreds, matching where they have been historically with their Perendale flock. The longer-term goal is to reach 130%.

In terms of meat production, the progeny from the AI programme reached an average liveweight of

45 kilograms (19.8 kilogram carcass weight) by 140 days. This put the Huttons right in the sweet spot for the Alpine Origin Merino (SILERE) contract provided by NZM and Silver Fern Farms, and \$18 / head in front of the schedule price. By finishing lambs on the property, the Huttons are able to maximise their returns, while getting them away early frees up feed for ewes prior to mating.

The current balance between fine and strong-wool sheep at Charles Hope is 2,500 quarterbreds to 2,500

Perendales. The short-term aim is to shift this balance to 3,000 quarterbreds and 2,000 strong-wool sheep. However, if the quarterbred continues on its positive trajectory, the longer-term objective is to move entirely to fine-wool sheep at Charles Hope.

NZM is thrilled to see the bold moves taken by the Huttons paying off and, along with Mark and Liz, we are hugely excited about the future of fine-wool sheep at Charles Hope.



MARK AND LIZ HUTTON - CHARLES HOPE

PROGENY FROM 2014 AI PROGRAMME:

- Weaned 115% at 12 weeks, with an average weight of 32.9 kilograms.
- Lambs averaged 45 kilograms at 140 days, (carcass weight of 19.8 kilograms).
- Averaged \$115.25 per lamb for finished lambs (SILERE contract)
- Ewe hoggets clipped 20.6 micron fleece, with an average fleece weight of 3.6 kilograms, yielding 72.3%.
- Averaged \$32.30 per head for ewe hogget wool (SmartWool contract)

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

- A quarterbred flock producing a 23-24 micron fleece, weighing 4.5-5 kilograms for SmartWool.
- 130% lambs weaned, with lambs finished on the property to take advantage of NZM and Silver Fern Farms' SILERE contract.

¹ The AI programme at Charles Hope was supported by the New Zealand Sheep Industry Transformation Project (NZSTX), a Primary Growth Partnership programme between NZM and the Ministry for Primary Industries.

For advice on maximising your returns from high-performance fine-wool sheep contact the NZM Production Science team – we would love to hear from you – www.perfectsheep.co.nz Phone: Dr Mark Ferguson 021 496 656 or Skye Rutherford 03 335 0911