

Romneys, Suffolks & Suffolk/Texels

10 November 2006

Dear Client

I hope spring has treated you kindly to date – for most it seems like a reasonable lambing let's just hope the dollar doesn't continue to sneak up and we get paid a reasonable price for our lambs. We have had a pretty good lambing at Nithdale with only a couple of really bad days weather wise. We are still to tail the lambs on the prelamb shorn ewes and hoggets yet so we won't know our overall percentage until the end of this month but we do have a lot of twins running around being back over 500 slinkies on last year.

Most of you will know that we made Ross Hurrell redundant back in March and he finished up at Nithdale in early June. It was a very difficult decision for us to make but as a result of the financial conditions we have experienced the last couple of years we had to make some major changes to both our staffing and management. We do want to acknowledge Ross' contribution to the property and both the Romney and Suffolk Studs. He worked on Nithdale for over 32 years – he enjoyed his work and was very committed to what he did. Ross is now working for James Paterson over at Wendonside where he has also taken his own Suffolk Stud. We certainly want to wish Ross and his family well working for James and any other future endeavours he engages in.

With Ross leaving it has meant I have taken over the day to day management of the farm and the sole running and operation of the Romney and Suffolk Studs which I have really enjoyed. It also means that it will give me a chance to actually meet some of our clients and get to know others better. I would really appreciate feedback from you as to what you think of where we are going with our breeding and also what your specific needs are in terms of sheep breeding. I look forward to working more closely with you over the years and helping you also to add value to your own business through our breeding program.

Below is some news of what we have been up to and what's in store over the next few years for our studs and an order form for rams for the current season.

Romneys

Our Stud Romneys have tailed just under 160% this year which we are reasonably happy with considering we culled a lot of the older ewes before mating and ended up with 1/3 of the ewes being 2ths. We have traditionally mated our Romney Stud ewes around the end of March (25 August lambing) but this next year we will mate them at least two weeks later. The last few years we have ended up with a higher number of late and dry 2ths (compared with our commercial 2ths that don't start lambing until the end of September). Having looked at many other possibilities I am now

convinced that a later mating date will aid in ovulation rate and conception rates particularly in the 2ths.

Our ram 457/00 still remains top of the Southern Romney Development Group and back to 4th on the Dual Purpose WormFEC Nationwide analysis (ACE). He is very good for fertility (NLB) and good across all his other traits (weaning weight, autumn weight, fleece weight and faecal egg count (FEC)). This last year we put him up for AI at Woodlands and we had a reasonable amount of interest in him. It was certainly an opportunity for other breeders around the country to use a ram that had been widely used in our group – one notable breeder who used him was Derek Daniel. This year's crop of 2th rams have a number that are sired by him and by sons of his so it will be good to see some of his offspring being used across our clients flocks.

We have made progress in introducing the Myomax gene into the Romneys over this last year. Last year we AIed some of our top Romney ewes to a Texel ram that was 8th in the ACE National Terminal Sire Summary. The ram had a double copy of the Myomax gene so all his progeny had one copy. We mated some of these ewe hoggets to a Romney/Texel from Murray Rohloff that had one copy of the Myomax gene. A quarter of these lambs will have two copies of the gene. We also mated some more Romney ewes to our own best Romney/Texel so we will have a number of $\frac{3}{4}$ Romneys with one copy of the Myomax gene. Our intention is to DNA test all lambs involved in this program, culling those without the Myomax gene and retaining those that have at least one copy. We aim to get down to at least a $\frac{3}{4}$ Romney or $\frac{7}{8}$ Romney with two copies of the gene that will be available for sale to our clients. We are mindful that some Texels do have traits that we don't want such as lower lambing percentage and poor feet so we will certainly be culling anything that isn't up to scratch. However by back crossing to our own Romney with each generation we should minimise anything else coming through. The end result will be a more meaty Romney that has the Myomax genes. We will continue breeding pure Romneys but we will also gauge interest from our clients over the next few years in order to determine what our clients want regarding the Myomax gene.

We are getting more enquiries concerning our WormFEC program and the progress we have made in reducing faecal egg counts. Obviously with the publicity concerning drench resistance farmers are looking at other options. Our genetic trends show that we have reduced faecal egg counts in our adult ewes by over 30% in the last 13 years (since we started the WormFEC program). This may not seem a lot and it certainly doesn't mean that we can throw away the drench gun however at least we are going in the right direction. Over that period of time we have also made significant gain in production: our number of lambs born has increased by 12%, weaning weights by 2kg, liveweights at 8 months of age by 3kg and fleece weights at 12 months of age by 0.4kg. The scientists say that faecal egg counts and production are positively correlated. So by increasing production without also selecting for low faecal egg counts, faecal egg counts will go up. A breeder who is not selecting for lower faecal egg counts may have made similar gains in production but it is also likely that the faecal egg counts in his sheep has increased by 20-30% over that same period so in comparison the difference between them and us may be more like 50-60% greater faecal egg contamination compared with thirteen years ago – that's quite a difference. Young lambs are still susceptible to nematodirus, so there is still a need for those early drenches if nematodirus is a problem. However by selecting for low faecal egg counts the age at which immunity begins to develop reduces and the overall level of immunity as an adult sheep is greater, therefore the number of drenches lambs need over their lifetime is less than before. Our ewe lambs only get four drenches in their life – the last is when they go onto the swedes and that's mainly because

they are going onto clean forage not because they have high faecal egg counts. We did however give our in lamb hoggets a shot of eweguard this year – we are still experimenting with this hogget lambing – if anyone has a secret recipe let me know!

A number of people around us head up North each year to get rams from Holmes Warren's Turanganui Stud (and Wairere amongst others). It does make me wonder at times why they pass our gate – obviously people think they can get better production from these Romneys than Nithdale Romneys. I certainly think we can do better with our own production in our commercial ewes. I'm convinced it is not the genetics – many of our clients are doing better than us! We just need to keep improving our management of them. I would appreciate your comments in this area – you can be as honest as you like! Hopefully over time we can change the tide! This last year we did purchase a stud sire from Turanganui so it will be interesting to see how he performs in our flock. They have just started selecting for low faecal egg count sheep so that will most likely count against that ram – but time always tells!

Suffolks

We have continued to make good progress with our Suffolks and Suffolk/Texels. As with the Romneys we are breeding the Myomax gene into our Suffolks. The advantage we have with the Suffolks is that we are a lot further down the track as we have been using a Texel across a number of them for some time. Both Texels we used in the first three years (1996-98) had double copies of the Myomax gene so it is quite prevalent through our flock already (other than the pure Suffolks). Our intention also is to breed at least a ¾ or 7/8 Suffolk with two copies of the Myomax gene available for sale to our clients. We have sold a number of Suffolk/Texel cross rams over the years (50:50), some years more than others. The reason clients have liked them is their extra meat (obviously the Myomax gene). The disadvantage is that many of the lambs from the resulting cross don't have particularly black faces. The end result of the crosses we are making now is a predominantly Suffolk ram leaving fast growing lambs with black faces (Suffolk traits) with plenty of meat (Myomax genes from the Texels). Once we get to this stage I don't think there will be much demand for the straight Suffolk/Texel cross rams. So unless there is we will be fading this cross out.

We have had enquiries from both the UK and US for Suffolk semen which has been really exciting. The UK Suffolk is very labour intensive (assisting virtually every lamb born and 40% of them suffering from some form of dystokia). They can't believe that we lamb our sheep outdoors assisting very few. This last Autumn we sent down 3 ram hoggets to Woodlands for AI collection. The protocol for sending semen overseas is very strict with a lot of animal health checks, blood tests and quarantine periods. For entry into the UK the rams need to be resistant to Scrapie (another DNA test) and to the US they prefer footrot tolerant Suffolks (another DNA test). So hopefully at the end of it all we get some return for our hard work!

The Suffolk Group we are involved with down here (Premier Suffolks) ran a progeny test with 6 top ram hoggets from members in the group over 300 commercial Romney ewes. Half the lambs were gone by the 15th December 2005 with only 4% of the lambs left by the 18th January. So most of the lambs killed had some component of Spring premium in the price. Average total yield was 53.3%. Our ram hogget used in the trial had the best average yield – over 54%. Being part of Premier Suffolks will help us through trials like this and sire referencing as a group. Since the group formed in 2004, there has

been a marked improvement across the group in our genetic trends, as a result of more extensive use of the better rams identified by sire referencing. At the end of the day the more progress we make the more will be passed onto you our clients!

Suffolk rams again featured strongly in the Alliance CPT trial with a ram from one of the members in our Suffolk Group gaining second place overall (still top for growth). We put up the top ram in our group for this years CPT trial so it will be interesting to see how he performs. It shows that Suffolks can be at or near the top of the Terminal Sire list for growth and meat and that we have some good genetics in our group.

This Years Sale Rams

We have had a few more enquiries from new clients and some confirmed orders already so it is likely that we will need to make available ram lambs for leasing as well as the 2th rams we have for sale. We would prefer to sell all the 2th rams first but we do want to cater for all our clients and give everyone a reasonable pick. The advantage of ram lambs is the next generation of improving genetics (a larger number as well). The main disadvantage of ram lambs from our perspective is that any which have been used by clients have to be kept separate after they come home for a month and tested for Brucella ovis which is required for us to keep our accreditation which is an extra cost to us. For anyone who wants to use ram lambs we request that you only have them out for 3 weeks with no other rams and we would prefer that you had your own rams tested for Brucella ovis (which is a good practice to do anyway).

I have pencilled in the first two weeks in February to sell rams so I will contact you before the end of January to arrange for you to come and pick your rams. If you won't be around those two weeks let me know on your order form and we can discuss other arrangements. Can you please send your ram order form back to me before Christmas.

If there is anything you wish to talk about or discuss please feel free to give me a ring on (03) 2053566 or 0272566647. You are more than welcome to come and have a look around anytime so give me a call if you would like to. It's actually a good time to come and look at our sheep with lambs still on their mothers. Thank you for your business and we look forward to seeing you in the new year.

Regards

Andrew & Heather Tripp

Nithdale Romneys, Suffolks & Texel Suffolks

Order Form – 2006/2007 Season

Name: _____

I would like to order:

Breed	Price	Number
<u>Romney 2th Rams</u>	\$700	_____
	\$500	_____
	\$400	_____
<u>Suffolk 2th Rams</u>	\$500	_____
	\$400	_____
<u>Texel/Suffolk 2th Rams</u>	\$500	_____
	\$400	_____

Romney ram lambs will be leased out for \$150 each, Suffolk and Suffolk/Texel rams will be leased out for \$120 each.

Please note for those who make payments by Direct
Credit we have a new Bank Account: 06 0335 0433545 00

Please send to:

Andrew Tripp
Nithdale
RD 2
Gore

By 25 December 2006