

This week we look into a best practice programme developed to create sustainability in the agricultural aviation industry called AIRCARE, and we visit Wharetoa Genetics, a sheep-breeding operation in Balclutha.

AIRCARE

The agricultural aviation industry has developed a programme to deliver best practice, called AIRCARE. As well as providing safety guidelines, the programme also focuses on environmental management systems. Aviation has been a huge contributor to New Zealand's agricultural sector for many years. Although a small number of operators are involved, their efforts over the past decade have added an estimated value to New Zealand's export income of \$2 billion a year.

The industry is running a three-year project titled *Environmental Best Practice for Agricultural and Rural Aviation* supported by the Sustainable Farming Fund and a number of stakeholders. Sixteen regional meetings were held, where pilots, stakeholders and regional regulators got together to explore ways to produce regional rules, which were consistent, uncomplicated and required best practice in respect of both aviation and regulatory outcomes. Both groups have similar aims, but up to now they have been following different pathways to achieve them. This new programme is providing a way to achieve those objectives by working together.

Wharetoa Rams

Garth and Chris Shaw own and run Wharetoa Genetics in Balclutha. They hold the largest privately run on-farm ram sale in New Zealand where over 300 rams are offered. Wharetoa farm is 413 hectares (380 effective) of rolling country carrying 3000 ewes, 800 ewe hoggets and 400 ram hoggets, which provide the sale rams. Wharetoa runs mainly Coopworth and Texel breeds as well as crossbreds for the Wharetoa maternal and Meatmaker terminal lines.

Garth Shaw has been a ram breeder for more than 30 years. His aim for the Wharetoa enterprise is to breed strong meat qualities into both maternal and terminal breeds, while maintaining fertility, survival, and resistance to internal parasites. Wharetoa has used SIL (Sheep Improvement Ltd) and modern scientific systems to identify and multiply elite genetics. Garth collects blood samples from all ram hoggets and tests for the Myomax and Wormstar genes. These identify animals with greater resistance to parasites and consequently higher productivity. The Myomax gene influences carcass weight and muscle yield on the leg and rump. Sheep can carry one or two copies of this gene and when identified with two they are called Myomax Gold. Garth is currently in the process of registering a new sheep breed he has named Meatmaker, a stabilized crossbreed of Poll Dorset and Texel. Current indications are that 60% of Meatmaker rams are Myomax Gold.

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