

Tough Breed Well Suited to Tough Country

Five years after Rainbow Station started to change its ewe flock to Perendales, manager Dave McEwen is convinced they are the right sheep for this tough country. Rainbow Station is one of nine sheep and beef farms run by Lone Star farms – all based in the South Island.

Up to five years ago it was a traditional store stock property that sold store lambs off a Romney flock, and sold calves.

In the past five years with extensive development, that is changing dramatically to a property where the aim is to finish all stock. Perendales are now the sheep of choice, and they have changed from a traditional Hereford herd to a more cross-bred one.

Rainbow Station, based at St Arnaud, is 6300ha in Marlborough and Nelson and lies northwest of Molesworth Station. The Raglan Run, 1500ha separated from Rainbow by the Wairau River, was added three years ago. Rainbow is a 47km-long, property where logistics are difficult.

Dave describes it as "river-run property" in which the front river flats are the intensive engine house of the farm, and back country is grazed by cattle only. The homestead is at about 600m and the property rises to over 1200m.

Perendales for

- Production
- Performance
- Profit

Despite the difficult country, Dave says he and his team have a great confidence and passion for farming there.

Development is ongoing and includes bringing non-productive land into production. Increased subdivision, fertiliser, increased use of brassicas and livestock genetic improvement has been a feature of recent years.

Rainbow is running 16,000 stock units. Of the 6400 Perendale ewe flock half go to a terminal breed ram, and half to a Perendale ram.

Dave, who has worked for Lone Star Farms for nearly 10 years, says that when he came to Rainbow five years ago the ewe flock was traditional Romney. For the past five years Perendale genetics have been continually introduced and the flock is now close to pure Perendale.

"I had intended that we would use Perendales until they plateaued off, and then we would probably have to put another breed through for hybrid vigour. But after five years, they haven't plateaued off yet."

Perendale rams come from Tim Anderson's Mt Guardian Stud on the Conway River near the coast in North Canterbury.

"Tim's passionate about what he's doing, and like anyone who believes in what he's doing, he gets results."

"This place has gone from roughly 100% lambing to 140% within five years. The only thing we've done is put Perendale over the flock, and have been very staunch on animal health and nutrition."

Last year's scanning percentage was 176% with a tailing percentage of 145%. This year's scanning percentage was 185% in mixed-aged ewes, with one mob of March-shorn ewes scanning 190%.

The half of the flock going to a terminal sire is run separately on the Raglan Run. The sires are Suffolk-Texels from Mt Linton. "We've found them to suit our requirements best at this stage."

However, nothing is set in stone at Lone Star Farms. The company has a policy of using consultants to bring in new ideas, and genetic policy is constantly under review by Wayne Anderson who is the company's operations co-ordinator, acting between the managers and the owner.

"He's keen and passionate, and has got our cattle and sheep moving in the right direction."

The 1800 replacements at the moment are "probably a tad too many", he says. That number is likely to be cut back to 1600 or fewer. "We're getting ewes which should be culled for age, but are still performing, so why get rid of them? The longevity of the breed continues to impress me."

Lambing is between September 5-10 and the lambs are aged in two 15-day brackets. "Anything after that I class as late and they don't get the same treatment as the main girls." Ninety per cent of twins and triplets, and 70% of singles lamb within 30 days.

They start drafting lambs still on their mothers in December, and wean just before or just after Christmas. "I aim to have 90% killed by the time we put the ram out in April. By then, I like to concentrate on next year's production."

Dave describes the Perendales as hardy and easy-care, with lambs that yield extremely well. "They have great bulky wool which we should be getting more for, and we will one day I'm sure."

He says he didn't come from a Perendale background and had to be sold on the breed. "I went along with company policy and have been completely converted to the point where I have recommended them to others who now buy their rams from Tim (Anderson), and they are also very happy."

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