



Increasing the bottom line – What was the process that led to increases in productivity and profitability? We highlight important factors that are key practices that every deer farmers should consider.

## Analyse your system

It is important to understand where your system excels and where it fails. Once these are known then adjustments can be made to maximise the opportunities and avoid the threats.

- A strengths and weaknesses analysis (SWOT) is one tool that can be used to set a course for improvement.
- An analysis of the productivity of the farm and different areas of the farm can also be done using various software tools or a farm consultant.
- A full financial analysis is also needed to assess the cost and profit structure of the farm business.
- Personal goals must also be set to ensure that work and play are in balance.

Once these analyses are done then action plans can be set in place for improvement. These approaches can be re-visited as circumstances change to ensure that the action plan meets financial and lifestyle requirements.

## Focus on getting the system right

The balance of stocking rate and stock classes needs to be right.

- Simplicity can be one of the goals of a system, as complexity increases labour demand, may compromise timely decision-making, and can upset the balance.
- Balance is also important to achieve the best utilisation of all of the feed supply and providing the right types of feed.

## Genetics

Buying in good genetics based on breeding values.

- Options may include buying the best stags you can afford or using an AI programme to generate your own sire stags.
- Venison and velvetting objectives should be considered separately for maximum gain.

## Wintering systems

The wintering system on a farm is often one of the most expensive and labour intensive parts of the business.

- Costs and benefits must be evaluated and optimised.
- Evaluate both the types of feed and their labour component.
- Examine their flexibility and impact on the rest of the system, such as spring peak production and summer production.

## Pregnancy scanning for management:

High calving percentage is a key to profitability and pregnancy scanning can help in several ways.

- Pregnancy scanning helps in diagnosing the timing and cause of low weaning rates.
- A consistent early calving can be generated by scanning early and culling late hinds. This depends on hind numbers and various management and breeding objectives.
- Foetal aging can help allocate feed in late winter and keep on top of feed in late spring by having different hind calving groups based on predicted calving times.

## Weaning weight

Weaning weight is one of the most important weights on the deer finishing farm.

- The average and range of live weight at weaning is used to help autumn and winter management. It is also used as a benchmark for improvement.
- Many actions can improve weaning weight and weaning practice.
- This includes the summer feed management, weaning practice and genetics.

## Growing out the weaners

Weaning weight is an important start when forming up the weaner mobs.

- Good weaning practice such as getting weaners familiar with their weaning paddocks and feed, and using other adult deer to settle weaners are all needed.
- Feed allocation is important. Keep any checks in feeding until the winter when growth is slow.
- Ensure that pasture covers are kept above 1500 kg DM/ha to ensure that weaners start growing as soon as possible in mid-August by having plenty of feed for them.
- Regular weighing is important to ensure that growth targets are met.

## Animal health practices are also important

- Regular drenching in early autumn is required.
- Monitoring of worm burdens can be done in spring to minimise drench use.
- Testing for copper and selenium can help prevent deficiencies.
- Remember good management practices for Yersiniosis and Johnes disease.



## WHERE TO GO TO FOR INFORMATION AND HELP?

- Attend the closest Deer Focus Farm field day or community group day
- Use a consultant and make use of your accounts analysis of annual finances.
- Publications like The Deer Farmer and Deer Industry News have technical updates.
- [www.deernz.org.nz](http://www.deernz.org.nz) - look under Publications for the Focus farm newsletters.
- [www.deerresearch.org.nz](http://www.deerresearch.org.nz) has technical updates and many previous articles.