

Innovative Practice

A SUSTAINABLE APPROACH FOR DEER

The Shabor team are driving the adoption of sustainable farm management practices on their Waikato deer farm.

Snapshot

- Farm business: Shabor Farms Ltd
- Location: Oparau, Waikato
- Owners/Managers: Steve and Chris Borland, and Bob Sharp
- Operation: 982 hectare farming operation focused on breeding for velvet production.

The 982 hectare farm is part of Shabor Ltd, a family business partnership between the Borland's and Bob Sharp, which recently received national recognition by winning the 'NZ Landcare Trust Award for Excellence in Deer Farming', along with the deer industry premier award 'The Elworthy Environmental Award 2017.'

The business started from scratch just three years ago with no deer fencing or deer shed. However the team had the foresight to seek good advice and worked closely with NZ Landcare Trust and Deer Industry NZ as part of a project entitled 'Adoption of Deer Industry Environmental Best Practices', during early development. A Farm Environmental Plan was produced to identify risk areas, recognise the natural features on the property and to assist decision making around the development of suitable farm systems and infrastructure.





The farm runs about 1150 stags consisting of a mix of two-year-olds spikers and mixed age stags as well as breeding hinds. The deer herd is geared around velvet production, and breeding replacement stags for their velveting farm in Whakamaru, run by Sharp.

In addition to a successful deer breeding unit, the farm runs sheep and beef - approximately 4,000 ewes and 200 cattle. The cattle stocking policy is subject to change under the Farm Environment Plan, so could be reduced to 100 units in the future.

The property receives in excess of two metres of rain per year with much of that arriving in pulses, which can see over 100mm fall in a couple of hours. The land is mostly steeply contoured with soil consisting of ash over clay, therefore the biggest concern revolves around erosion and sedimentation of waterways, combined with associated nutrient losses. As an additional challenge, 54 of the farms 56 paddocks contain natural water bodies.

To mitigate these problems the farm maintains a low stocking rate of ten units per hectare and also has an extensive fencing programme underway - over 35 kilometres of fencing has been installed since the operation began in 2015.

The farm has three main waterways, one of which runs 1.5km along the farm boundary and was one of the first to be fenced off. Some fencing has been completed with financial assistance from the Regional Council such as a 1 kilometre double fence line which runs from the deer shed to one of the farm's native bush stands. This work will protect both sides of a significant stream and ultimately help protect Aotea Harbour - the destination for water from these upper catchment streams.

As director responsible for on-farm development, Steve Borland is very proud of their achievements - protecting the environment while maintaining a profitable business. Steve says the property has always been open to scrutiny and he regularly hosts other deer farmers, taking these opportunities to share ideas and discuss pros and cons of different approaches. They are also part of the deer industry's 'Advance Parties' programme, which involves groups of motivated deer farmers who identify and implement focused opportunities to lift profit on their individual farms. Steve says he appreciates the input he gets from the local Advance Party and regularly implements ideas.

For more information

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