



SIL Newsletter

MEAT & WOOL NZ

Genetics

Issue 11

Autumn 2010

*Welcome to the first 2010 newsletter for SIL breeders & others in the sheep industry.
Several important things are covered here.*

- *Changes to SIL due to the M&WNZ referendum outcome.*
- *Revised Growth and Meat indexes are scheduled for release in late April. Changes are explained.*
- *We are changing SIL-ACE data access so ALL animals can be reported on in eSearch. If you do not want this to occur for any flocks you have in SIL-ACE, you must opt out of SIL-ACE*
- *All active flocks are to be given a new variable called "Genetic Vision". This will help you describe sheep you are selling or searching for in eSearch, the new on-line search tool for SIL-ACE.*

*If you have questions about topics in this newsletter, please contact your SIL bureau in the first instance. If they cannot help, you can send an email to or leave a phone message with **silhelp** (contact details later). Please note that these **silhelp** services are now monitored less frequently than previously.*

Best wishes for 2010

Dr Mark Young

SIL Geneticist for Meat & Wool New Zealand

In this newsletter we will cover:

- Changes to SIL operation due to M&WNZ referendum outcome
- SIL eNotes
- *silhelp*
- Growth & Meat index changes
- **eSearch** for SIL-ACE
- Ewe Longevity & Bareness
- SIL Newsletter delivery
- Things SIL wants **you** to do

Feature Article

- Flock "Genetic Vision"

Contact SIL

Phone: 0800 silhelp (0800 745 435)
Email: silhelp@sheepimprovement.co.nz
Website: www.sil.co.nz

Changes to SIL operation due to M&WNZ referendum outcome

It is business as usual for SIL genetic evaluations.

SIL will maintain current capability for the database and genetic evaluation systems. SIL will continue to conduct SIL-ACE across-flock genetic evaluations at no additional cost to participating flocks.

SIL has had to reduce its Adviser service. The SIL Technical Adviser and three part-time SIL Adviser positions have been dis-established. The implication is that this will reduce some services to support breeder queries. Breeders should, as has always been the case, direct SIL queries to their bureau in the first instance. It should also be noted that the *silhelp* service will be monitored less frequently.

Mark Young is M&WNZ's employee with a primary focus on SIL. He will focus on management of the business, technical development and working with the different groups that use SIL. He will work closely with developers aiming to produce enhanced tools for use by sheep breeders and their ram buying clients.

What about wool?

Although Meat & Wool New Zealand lost the wool levy, SIL will still record and conduct genetic evaluations for wool traits and wool will be in DP indexes. Wool is still a feature of all sheep enterprises. We will not invest in developments for wool but we will revise economic weightings when we revise SIL indexes across all traits.

SIL charges increase

SIL has increased its wholesale charges by 20%, effective from 1st October 2009. Bureaus were informed of these changes in November 2009. This increase does not recover the amount lost from the wool levy.

This increase is to wholesale charges made to SIL bureaus. Charges made by bureaus to their ram breeder clients for SIL activity may change more or less than this.

Another change is that SIL will now charge for all animals added to the SIL database. Previously SIL charged bureaus for each new animal but allowed backdata to be added without charge. This was an incentive when SIL was first established to make it less costly for breeders to move to the SIL system from other recording schemes. It is considered that this incentive is no longer appropriate.

SIL eNotes

Regrettably we are suspending production of SIL eNotes while SIL reviews its activity. If you have feedback about the eNotes that you think will help us in evaluating where we focus our efforts, please send an email to *silhelp*.

silhelp

Loss of SIL advisers means we can no longer service the *silhelp* lines (freephone and email) on a regular and frequent basis. The lines will still be operational but checked less frequently.

SIL breeders should contact their SIL bureau or Across Flock Report Manager with queries related to their data, the SIL system or reports they have received. SIL will continue to provide support to the bureaus.

- Telephone: **0800 silhelp** (0800 74 54 35)
- Email: silhelp@sheepimprovements.co.nz

Growth & Meat index changes

SIL has revised the Growth and Meat evaluations for DP and TS sheep to;

- make Growth and Meat (carcass merit) independent,
- separate Lamb Growth from Adult size for DP sheep,
- use more ewe LW data to predict genetic for adult size,
- add lean yield into the Meat (carcass merit) index,
- reduce the number of index variations as these caused confusion.

Included in this newsletter is a "web note" outlining how changes will affect the figures you use. Please take the time to read this web note carefully. The changes made will affect how you interpret figures for Growth and Meat indexes, and their BVs, on your SIL reports.

These indexes have been tested with a range of flocks with a range of data types. Initial tests revealed some anomalies but these have been investigated and the evaluation modules fine tuned to produce robust results.

SIL will introduce the new Growth and Meat indexes, with their BVs in late April 2010. Old indexes will still be available to use for the following six months or so.

eSearch for SIL-ACE

SIL is developing an on-line tool, **eSearch**, to provide the sheep industry with better access to genetic information. This tool will tap into the wealth of genetic information held in each SIL-ACE evaluation. At present, the SIL-ACE leader lists on the SIL website provide only limited help to ram buyers looking for flocks to buy rams from while for breeders they provide information only on extreme merit animals for selected indexes.

We are currently focusing work on a Ram Buyer tool in **eSearch**, called "FlockFinder". This tool will allow a ram buyer to select traits they want to consider when they buy rams and then search for flocks that have genetic information on these traits in SIL-ACE. It will not be used to rank animals or flocks for genetic merit or to provide information on individual animals. It will simply produce a list of flocks with links to flock contact details.

We will then focus on development of a "RamFinder" tool in **eSearch** – this is based on the tool demonstrated at the SIL Sheep Genetics Day in June 2009. Focused on ram breeders, this enables users to specify different genetic criteria that animals must meet (e.g. minimum or maximum values for BVs and indexes or specific genotypes). It locates individual sheep meeting these criteria that breeders might consider for use in their breeding programme. Search results will be limited to several hundred individuals. One innovation is the development of pictorial depictions of genetic merit for individuals. Bar graphs show where animals place in the SIL-ACE percentile bands for different BVs and indexes.

SIL will be changing the nature of the agreement we have with SIL-ACE participant flocks in regard to what animals can be reported on. Currently we only report on animals that are in the top 20% (or less) for each Leader List on the SIL website. We are going to change this so that **eSearch** can report on ANY animal in participating flocks.

If you do NOT agree to this change, you can opt out of SIL-ACE by notifying *silhelp*. SIL will require all flocks participating in SIL-ACE to allow reporting on all animals. SIL intends trialing **eSearch** in April 2010. If you want to "opt out", please inform SIL by 30th April 2010 using *silhelp* (contact details below). You need to tell us your name (first & last), flock prefix(es) and SIL flock number(s) for all flocks you want to withdraw from SIL-ACE.

Ewe Longevity & Bareness

We now have recording protocols on the SIL website for these two goal traits which were described in the last newsletter. Go to the home page (www.sil.co.nz) to find a link taking you to these documents.

SIL Newsletter delivery

SIL is looking at ways to reduce operating costs. One way is to reduce printing and postage costs associated with our newsletters. If you are happy to get these by email, please switch to that mode for delivery. One advantage will be that you receive the newsletter sooner.

To switch to email delivery of SIL newsletters, please send an email to *silhelp* with a subject line of "SIL newsletter by email" and the following information in the body of the message (i.e. not the subject line).

1. Your first name & surname
2. The SIL flock prefix (name) for one of your flocks OR your connection with the sheep industry if not a SIL breeder
3. Your SIL flock number (not the breed society number)
4. Your telephone number, including area code

Unfortunately we have not got an up-to-date list of those who previously agreed to get their newsletter by email. If you are one of those people, please could you remind SIL of this by sending an email to *silhelp*.

Things SIL wants you to do

- Review information on the new Growth and Meat indexes to help you interpret SIL reports. More information will be available on our website shortly.
- If you do not agree to **eSearch** being able to report on genetic merit for any animal in flocks of yours that participate in SIL-ACE, you should inform SIL that you wish to opt out before 30th April 2010.
- Tell your bureau if the Genetic Vision of your flock(s) is different to the value(s) SIL generates (see later article). Your bureau will be able to tell you what this value is.
- Inform SIL if you wish to receive SIL Newsletters by email instead of by post.
- For queries about your data, the SIL evaluation or SIL reports please contact your bureau or your Across Flock Report Manager.

Flock “Genetic Vision”

SIL is introducing a new flock variable, “Genetic Vision”. This can be thought of as your philosophy or approach to genetic improvement for that flock. We need this because the way SIL records “breed” for an animal is not closely related to the way sheep genotypes are marketed. Genetic Vision is related to what you are selecting for or how you conduct your flock breeding programme. As such it may not be related to the breed make up of individual animals within that flock.

Why is this necessary? Many breeders select their animals in a way closely aligned to that of pure breeds but are open to using the odd ram of a different breed to inject something different. The low percentage of genetics from the outside breed in their flock means that their “Genetic Vision” is most likely to be the same as that of the dominant breed. Conversely, a range of new “genotypes” have been developed in recent years through crossing different breeds and these are marketed under distinctive, sometimes trademarked, names or brands.

SIL does not want to lose the information we have on breeds in the pedigree of animals. This would occur if we decided that after a certain time, animals born were given a single new breed name despite having significant proportions of different parent breeds in their pedigree.

We have coined the term “Genetic Vision” to help. Genetic Vision will give breeders a way of signaling the genetic direction or distinctiveness of their flock(s). It will allow SIL information to be better aligned with flock “branding”. It is an alternative search criterion to “Breed” in the upcoming **eSearch** tool.

How will this work? You don’t have to do anything. For most flocks, SIL will generate a Genetic Vision. Owners can instruct their bureau to have this changed if they wish. SIL will generate the Genetic Vision now, just once, for all

existing active flocks. Subsequently it will be up to you and your bureau to specify the Genetic Vision if this changes or for new flocks.

How does SIL know what the “Genetic Vision” is for my flock? For every active flock on SIL we will look at the average breed percentage of animals born in the last few years. If they are a high percentage of just one breed, we will say the Genetic Vision is that breed. If it is below 85% we will designate the Genetic Vision as “Composite”.

Examples. Flock X is a Romney flock that used a Perendale ram in 2008 and a Coopworth ram in 2009. The average breed mix is 96% Romney for animals born in the last 2 years. SIL will say the Genetic Vision is “Romney”. Flock Y, was originally Coopworth, then it used Texel-Finn cross rams and interbred their progeny. Over the last 2 years animals born averaged 64% Coopworth (the highest % of the three breeds). SIL will say the Genetic Vision is “Composite” but the owner changes this to “YoungSTAR”.

Flock owners should contact their Bureau to find out the Genetic Vision of their flock(s). It can be changed provided that does not violate any trademark or copyright legal issues SIL has been fully informed of.

Genetic Vision can be put on SIL reports for individual animals. It is determined by their Birth Flock.

Genetic Vision is an attribute of the birth flock, not of individual animals born or used in the flock.

Updated Flock Lists for Health traits

SIL has updated the website lists of flocks registered for genetic evaluations of Parasite Resistance, Parasite Resilience and Facial Eczema Tolerance. Go to www.sil.co.nz and look for these under “Buying Rams”.

Contact your SIL bureau:	Bureau:	Contact:	Phone:
	The New Zealand Animal Breeding Trust	Clare Callow	06 354-9119
	FlockLinc	Chris Logan	03 325-3838 (extn 8620)
	Geneplan	Alan Warren	03 688-1131
	Genetic Gains	Julia Aspinall	03 216-3455
	Livestock Administration & Account Services	Joanne Pinfold / Christine Ramsay	06 323-4156
	PBBNZ	Linda Shailer / Barbara Beckett	06 323-4484
	NZ Performance Recording Services Ltd	Ken Moore	03 338-8078
	NZ Sheepbreeders Association	Lyndsay Gough	03 358-9412