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Summary only

FRIESIAN AND BEEF BREED PERFORMANCE IN AN
IMPROVED TUSSOCK ENVIRONMENT

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THE South Island tussock grassland, when improved by oversown grasses and clovers, has considerable potential for cattle production. As beef cattle numbers in this area are rapidly increasing, knowledge of breed performance, particularly of the Friesian, is important.

A survey (Tara Hills High Country Survey 1968, unpubl.) of 48 tussock runs in the Waitaki-MacKenzie region showed the distribution of breeds in 5,600 breeding cows to be Hereford 73%, Angus 17%, Galloway 8%. Limited crossbreeding was practised mainly with Angus and Short-horn bulls on Hereford cows. This distribution differed widely from that of the national beef breeding herd.

In trials at Tara Hills the productive performance of Friesian, Hereford (mated to Hereford and Friesian) Angus and Galloway cows has been compared. Heifer calves were purchased as weaners, each breed from several sources, and were first calved at 2 years of age. Except at mating and calving all breeding cows grazed improved tussock blocks between 490 and 1,150 m (1,500 and 3,500 ft).

The mean liveweight of Friesian cows at mating was 315 kg and that of beef breeds 273 to 293 kg. Comparable differences between breeds existed at weaning. At birth Friesian calves were 3.5 kg heavier than Hereford calves and 10.5 kg heavier than Angus calves.

Calves were weaned in April at approximately 180 days. Liveweight gains from birth to weaning for 1969 and 1970 were Friesian, 0.87, 0.89; Hereford, 0.66, 0.60; Friesian × Hereford, 0.63, 0.62; Angus, 0.63, 0.61; Galloway, 0.48, 0.58 kg/day, respectively.

The general performance of Friesian cows and the clear advantage in weaning weight of their calves, establishes the potential of this breed on tussock grassland.