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Vital components of industry-wide benchmarking

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ABSTRACT

For the full benefits to be realised from farm monitoring and benchmarking it is essential that it is available to all farmers at an affordable price. The data must be relevant to participants, easily collected, and processed into a form that is easily understood. NZFT2000 is an example of how these principles can be put into practice for the benefit of individual sheep farmers and the whole sheep industry.

Keywords: Sheep; monitoring; benchmarking.

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand Farm Technology 2000 (NZFT 2000) is a user driven umbrella organisation to support farm monitoring and benchmarking on sheep farms throughout New Zealand. NZFT 2000 is responsible for the creation of an environment whereby regional users can function autonomously, efficiently and effectively for the financial good of each farmer member. As a director of NZFT 2000, I consider it important that the core monitoring components fulfil a number of criteria. They must be:

1. Accessible to all NZ Sheep Farmers

There are several well established regional monitoring groups including the initial group in South Otago, CF 2000, which was the forerunner for the programme. If a group lacks the critical mass to be established immediately, or if an individual farmer is geographically isolated, a multi-district branch will accommodate their needs. Planned advancements include on-line accessibility to the database so individual members and/or their consultants can access relevant updated data for immediate decision-making. Flexibility of access for data entry and retrieval is paramount.

2. Affordable to all members

NZFT2000 decides on the menu of production parameters and negotiates with service providers the cost and delivery of processed data. It is important that costs are contained and benefits highlighted to ensure that all sheep farmers will profit from membership.

3. Meaningful and relevant

The data collected and the manner in which it is presented to members must be meaningful and relevant to the industry within and across regions. This relevance must be clear to members to ensure their full commitment to the recording process. The core monitoring section is compulsory and involves only basic information such as lambing percentages and strategic liveweights. The optional section is an advancement on the core data, facilitating higher levels of participation for members with greater skill levels and/or technical requirements.

4. Easily collected

There is a hidden cost in the collection of raw data. It is therefore important that data are collected in a form that imposes the minimum of inconvenience on the farm. Some data are obtained from routine farm records, but for many farmers membership requires that they also collect additional information that was not previously recorded in their flocks, such as liveweights. Full participation by members is crucial and the effort required to gather data must not be seen as a barrier to membership.

5. Clearly presented

It is critical that the processed data are presented in a form that is easily understood. Professional interpretation must also be part of the service to enable members to gain an appreciation of the complete on-farm picture. This allows for the involvement of the entire management team as nominated by the member and ensures that the full benefits of monitoring are captured.

As well as ensuring that the above criteria are met, NZFT 2000 has an important supportive role with regional branches to enable them to create an environment of enthusiasm and support for local members. By fostering these relationships NZFT 2000 can help make the benefits of monitoring and benchmarking available to the entire sheep industry. In addition to administrative duties, the role of NZFT2000 includes focus meetings with regional committees and managers to share ideas, and co-ordination of sponsorship funding. There are also NZFT2000 quality approval schemes such as flock productivity assurance for purchasers and vendors of livestock seeking access to, or a fair return for, breeding stock sold from a flock that has achieved a high level of productivity through performance monitoring and benchmarking.