UNLOCKING THE
PERFECT SHEEP(s)

GETTING STARTED WITH EID

www.perfectsheep.co.nz

ELECTRONIC IDENTIFICATION (EID) can give you visibility into the lifetime productivity of individual sheep, providing valuable information for making decisions across your sheep farming enterprise. It is also surprisingly simple to get started and integrate into your current farm system.

While you can achieve a lot by managing sheep at the mob level, EID allows you to go further – tracking and managing sheep at the individual level – allowing you to identify the best and worst performers.

Many NZM growers are using EID to track important profit drivers – ewe reproduction, fleece weights and other performance indicators – at an individual level. This data enables them to make better informed decisions across their businesses.

The team at NZM is keen to help you get going, focusing on your main profit driver for a start, and gradually integrating EID into your wider sheep farming enterprise.

DID YOU KNOW?

On average, only 75% of mixed age ewes actually function as a ewe for the year.

Taking into account ewe mortality, ewes that scan dry and ewes that lose their lamb(s), on average, 25% of ewes do not contribute a weaned lamb in a given year.

By using EID, you can identify this 25% and make better decisions about how to manage them.

NEW ZEALAND
MERINO

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING EID?

Like any technology, new uses for EID are developing all the time. These are some of the advantages you can benefit from when you start using EID in your sheep flock:

TRACKING CHANGES OVER TIME: The biggest benefit of EID is being able to see how individual animals perform over time.

For instance, if all your animals graze the same pasture, which animals outperform the others? EID can show you which ewes maintain body condition in tougher conditions, and which ewes are consistently rearing lambs.

EID allows you to identify poor performing sheep, remove them from the breeding flock, and instead focus on breeding from your peak performers.

LIFETIME PERFORMANCE: Each ewe's lifetime data can be stored on her ear tag – annual scanning performance, body condition, ability to raise lambs, shearing data, even the paddocks she has grazed – giving you comprehensive data to make decisions with, from mating to culling, as well as day-to-day management.

EASE OF RECORDING: The days of double handing data are over! With a simple EID setup, you can put your data directly into an electronic weigh scale indicator (scale head) and easily transfer this onto your computer, saving time and reducing the chance of errors.

PRACTICAL TO USE: The equipment is tough and durable, and it integrates with portable yards, weigh crates and drafting systems.

TRACEABILITY: As you do for your other livestock, you can trace individual animals from the paddock right through processing, with the opportunity for feedback from your meat company.

RAM BREEDERS: The biggest benefit of EID in a stud situation is the increased efficiency of data collection, storage and retrieval.

WHERE DO I START?

Growers already using EID recommend starting with:

• A single age group.

• Recording one or two measurements for each animal.

In your first year, tag your ewe replacements; then repeat the following year with the next generation. Within five years, you will have five age groups tagged and a useful data set for most of your breeding ewes.

A great place to start is recording weights and condition scores at key times such as weaning, mating and scanning. Then you can add scanning information and compare conception rates by weight and condition score.

You can expand the data you record as you become more comfortable with the system – e.g. growth rates in young stock, wet/dry ewes at tailing and shearing data – depending on the production goals of your farm.

HOW MUCH DOES IT COST TO SET UP?

The benefits of EID need to be worth the investment of both your money and the time you spend learning how to use it. Here we have pulled together pricing information from a range of companies to give you an idea on set up costs.

An EID panel reader and auto drafter can be a time and labour saver once you are recording more information, across a larger number of sheep. However, they are not necessary for you to start getting significant benefits out of using EID.

EID tags and technology can be purchased from brands such as Gallagher, Te Pari, Farmquip, Allflex and Tru-Test.

YOUR BASIC STARTING KIT INCLUDES –

→ EID tags (reusable tags are available) - **$1.75-$3.00** per tag

→ A weigh scale indicator (scale head) with an alphanumeric keypad and Bluetooth capability - **$2,000-$5,750**

→ A portable stick reader - **$1,200-$2,400**

→ A weigh crate - starting from **$2,100**

→ Load bars - starting from **$1,220**

If you want to extend your technology kit, and increase efficiency in the yards, you can add an EID panel reader - **$640-$2,300**

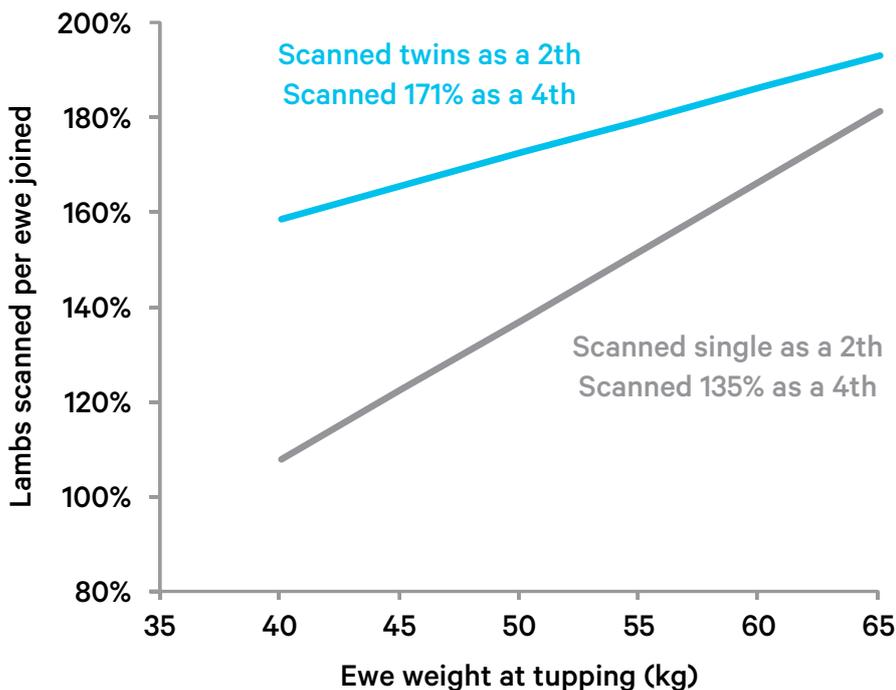And, for the ultimate setup, an auto drafter will cost **$13,000+**

LIFTING FERTILITY AT OMARAMA STATION

At Omarama Station, Richard and Annabelle Subtil are focusing on increasing fertility in their Merino flock through both breeding and feeding. Their ideal sheep has good carcass traits, is fertile, and lambs at a consistently high percentage.

Using EID and lifetime production data, the most productive ewes are being identified to keep as breeding stock. As shown in the graph below, comparative measurements taken over time enable the Subtils to understand which sheep are adding the most value to their business.

The performance difference between the top and bottom 30% within a flock would not be visible unless individual animal management was being applied.

WHAT DO THE NUMBERS LOOK LIKE?

Looking at the two different groups of ewes – those that were scanned with twins as two-tooths (group one) and those that were scanned with a single as two-tooths (group two) – group one scanned at 171% as four-tooths, while group two scanned at 135% as four-tooths.

If we assume a 20% loss to weaning in both groups, group one will wean 1.37 lambs per ewe, while group two will only wean 1.08 lambs per ewe.

EID makes the reasons behind the difference more visible – in this example, the weight at tupping is clearly correlated with the number of lambs scanned, and the fertility of the ewes in group two was more sensitive to liveweight at tupping.

At Omarama Station, this information is being used to select ewes with better genes for fertility (keeping more of the top-performers), while also allocating more feed to the ewes that need it most (improving the bottom end of the flock).

SCANNING PERFORMANCE OF FOUR–TOOTH EWES AT OMARAMA STATION

Scanned twins as a 2th
Scanned 171% as a 4th

Scanned single as a 2th
Scanned 135% as a 4th

Lambs scanned per ewe joined

Ewe weight at tupping (kg)

NEW ZEALAND MERINO

CONTACT THE NZM PRODUCTION SCIENCE TEAM

For more information on using EID and how it could benefit your business, contact the NZM Production Science team – we would love to hear from you – www.perfectsheep.co.nz

NEW ZEALAND MERINO