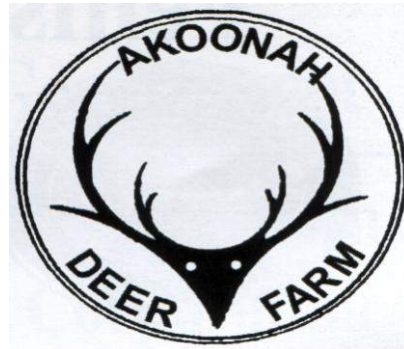




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AKOONAH DEER FARM 20 Year Concise Summary

By Michael Coffin



The farm commenced in September 1989 with 100 acres and 35 mixed age Australian Red Deer stags. Today it runs a predominantly pure Warnham Park velvetting herd of some 200 stags and a breeding hind herd of some 20 to 50, plus weaners of a similar number on 150 acres.

Spikers are not velveted. Accordingly, the velvet head count in the graph below is currently only 158.

We continued herd building with only minor temperament culling through to 1999. The strategy became a focus on velvet antler rather than size for venison. It had become clear that the English lines were more hardy than the European lines in the harsh Ballarat region climate, the velvet pass-on rate was more consistent, and the total velvet harvest was better.

The breeding hind herd was reduced to 20 and the bottom end velvet stags were sold for venison in large numbers. A pure Warnham stag, Pur 6027, was purchased from Ostlers Hill, an embryo transfer son of Windermere James from Mount Hutt in NZ. Although his antler style was short in beam and not clean, the cross with our mix of Otto and Shogun lines produced progeny of good size with good clean velvet.

The velvet focus from 1999 is clearly evident in the below graph. The dip in 2006 is due to a large number of mature, but poor temperament stags being sold for venison when velvet prices were low and venison prices high.

The number of hinds is based on the use of river flats, sown to tall fescue, providing good green fodder from September through to March. This is ideal for lactating hinds and realization of the full potential of calf growth for that all important start to life.

The "Windermere effect" peaked in 2003 and was exaggerated by heavy culling. The total cut trend is steeper than the average age trend.

The graph below shows that in 1993 the average age was 6.2 years, with an average of 2.5 kg total cut compared to 5.04 kg in 2008 with an average age 6.9 years – a 100% improvement.

The real trend continued through the application of AI using imported straws from New Zealand of William Wallace and then followed by Andre. Although environmental effects were largely responsible for a temporary reverse trend in total cut during 2004, the imported genetics are currently providing a steeper trend in total cut than that due to an increase in average age. Improved management of the drought conditions has undoubtedly also played a significant role.

Our principle aim was to achieve a 2 yr old average 1st cut of 2 kgs. This was realized in 2005 and continues to improve. Even the "Shogun" line or progeny in 1992 only averaged some 1.4 kgs. The current line is far superior and it will be interesting to see how far it will go before further AI is required.

With a lifespan of 15 years, a herd of average hovering around 9 years is expected to optimize the yield for this genetic line.

Accordingly, a combination of good genetics, optimal herd average age, sound management practice, and reasonable velvet prices is expected to sustain a viable business well into the future.

