

# Going on a fencing offensive

Otago Advance Party members, Glen and Renee Harrex, are fencing their way to improved fawn survival, weaner growth and utilisation of their irrigated land.

**ON GREENVALE DOWNS**, a partly irrigated 800 hectare farm near Becks in Central Otago, fawn survival to sale has hovered around 86–88 percent, but Glen Harrex believes they can bump this up to 92 percent by fencing another 100 hectares of dryland.

Until now, the 730 mixed age hinds have fawned on the 200 hectares of better-quality irrigated pastures, but it's been less than ideal due to the in-your-face spray treatment from solid-set irrigation, the regular shifting of k-lines and movement of various stock groups through their paddocks.

The net result has been mis-mothering and fawn deaths, usually within the first few days of birth. Although unhappy with the losses, Harrex believed the trade-off was better-lactating hinds and therefore faster-growing weaners for the pre-Christmas chilled market. However, he changed his thinking after visiting another Otago Advance Party farm that was achieving similar weaner growth rates – without the fawn losses – on more extensive dryland hill country.

The Harrexes decided that new fencing on a dryland block could be the game-changer they were after and in winter 2015 they fenced 84 hectares at a cost of \$13.64/metre (Table 1).

Table 1: Fencing costs – Stage 1

8,777 metres, 84 hectares of paddocks with central lane	
Material	\$83,650
Install	\$46,516
Tree trim	\$2,000
Less	
Credit for unused material	\$7,820
Contribution from neighbour for boundary fence	\$4,600
Total	\$119,746 (\$13.64/metre)

Note 1: Estimated internal rate of return over 10 years is 15 percent

Note 2: Five years to pay off initial investment if there is an annual net benefit of \$25,000.

The block was subdivided into six paddocks with a central lane using 16 run netting at a cost of almost \$120,000. Advance Party facilitator, Simon Glennie, has estimated the fencing will take 2½ years to pay back. This FARMAX® estimate is based on an extra \$43,000 of annual income comprising:

- \$10,000 from the extra 35 fawns due to a fawning increase from 88 to 93 percent, and
- \$33,000 of meat/grazing income from weaner deer, cattle and contract grazed dairy heifers.

The on-farm results validate the FARMAX model and prove that most of the value in dryland fencing is from improved utilisation of the irrigated pasture.

“The biggest gain has been from a farm system perspective, in particular the opportunity for higher-value enterprises on the

irrigated paddocks such as weaner finishing and growing bulls faster,” Glennie says.

“Being able to offload hinds from the irrigated pasture during the spring growth flush has been a huge advantage.”

Instead of losing feed quality while hinds fawn, the irrigated paddocks were grazed by yearling bulls which grew at 1.8kg/day over five months. A stocking rate of five bulls/ha was maintained over the period producing a \$1,500–\$1,800/ha net margin. At the same time, hinds that would have been fawned on the irrigation at 7/ha were stocked at 6/ha on the dryland with good fawn survival. When feed cover on the dryland reduced, hinds and weaners were moved onto the irrigated pasture which had the two-fold benefit of increasing hind lactation and condition for mating. Pre-winter growth rates of weaners were improved by about 6kg, producing a further 190 weaners for the higher-paying chilled venison market.

The new fencing appears to have significantly improved fawning performance based on a comparison trial of mixed age hinds from fawning until tagging. There was an 85 percent fawning on the existing dryland fenced paddocks. There were also six instances of fawns poking through fences and stranding themselves, although Harrex says it happened in one paddock that has a long history of mis-mothering. Fawning on the irrigated pasture was 96 percent, and 95% on the newly fenced blocks with no instances of fawns through fences or in lanes.

Individual paddock results showed that mixed age hind performance was reasonably good on all areas and that R2 results were comparatively poor on all areas. New dryland areas performed well, but whether this was due to the fencing or the subdivision being on a quieter part of the farm remains up for debate.

Harrex is stoked with the results to date.

“It wasn't exactly rocket science but it's given us the ability to put the right animals in the right place at the right time.” ■



Renee and Glen Harrex: The investment in fencing should pay for itself quickly.