



B+LNZ commitment to the welfare of sheep and beef cattle

MAY 2017

Beef + Lamb New Zealand works to promote good animal welfare as an intrinsic part of productive, sustainable and profitable livestock farming.

Animal welfare issues are also becoming increasingly important commercially. Aside from the fact that healthy animals are productive animals, regulatory and standards-setting institutions such as the European Union and the OIE are taking a greater interest in animal welfare issues, seeking to promote higher standards across the world's diverse livestock production systems.

Of perhaps equal significance to these global regulatory expectations, are those of key customers which in turn reflect the views of consumers. Consumers increasingly seek more ethically sound products and have driven the development of a host of private standards encompassing a range of sustainability attributes, including animal welfare.

One of the challenges facing New Zealand's pastoral industries is in demonstrating that our, often different, production systems deliver similar or better overall standards of animal welfare than those in operation outside of New Zealand.

The Animal Protection Index, which ranks 50 countries across the world on their animal welfare standards, places New Zealand (along with the United Kingdom, Austria and Switzerland) in first place.

Recognising that animal welfare is increasingly important, B+LNZ invests farmer levies in a range of activities that continue to ensure that sheep and beef cattle farming in New Zealand has a reputation for animal welfare to be proud of.

Did you know?

Easy care lambing under New Zealand conditions is possible owing to many years of selection for breeds of sheep able to cope with our occasionally challenging environment, supported by expert stockmanship. Studies show that lamb survival rates in New Zealand compare favourably with intensive systems used overseas where lambs are housed and managed indoors – a system that poses different challenges to the health and welfare of the animals.

These activities include:

Research

B+LNZ has a diverse portfolio of research, completed and ongoing, that covers nearly every aspect of stock management. In the pastoral sector, commercial drivers and welfare promotion are often closely aligned, where healthy and productive animals are also likely to experience a high level of welfare. This facet of our industry means that much of the research undertaken within the sector has direct benefits for animal welfare.

This holistic view that good farming is synonymous with good welfare is particularly apparent in B+LNZ's considerable investment in research into stock genetics. In addition, recent years have seen B+LNZ (or its predecessors) direct significant resources towards research into:

- Reducing the impacts of internal parasites
- The epidemiology, pathogenicity and management of Johne's disease
- Developing / assessing objective measures of animal welfare
- Lamb survival
- Calf rearing
- Managing stress in cattle pre-slaughter
- Management of bearings, facial eczema, pneumonia, footrot and flystrike in sheep.



Provision of technical policy advice and industry representation

As the levy-funded representatives of sheep and beef farmers, B+LNZ employs technical staff with skills and experience who are able to represent the sector in wider discussions with regulators and other stakeholders about sheep and beef cattle welfare. In engaging in welfare policy issues, B+LNZ representatives are guided by the following simple principles:

- Good welfare must be promoted
- Poor welfare must be prevented
- Interventions should be proportionate and focused on outcomes
- Interventions should be based on scientific evidence and / or established husbandry expertise
- B+LNZ has a role in educating levy payers regarding regulatory requirements and encouraging good animal welfare, it is not an enforcement agency.

At the policy level, B+LNZ:

- Provides technical and administrative input to the development and delivery of Codes of Welfare, published under the Animal Welfare Act
- Participates in the National Animal Behaviour and Welfare Consultative Committee
- Is an active partner in MAF's National Animal Welfare Compliance Plan and Farm to Processor Welfare Forum
- Provides technical and policy advice to farmers, industry, regulators and other stakeholders (e.g. NGOs), both domestically and internationally, on welfare issues involving sheep and beef cattle.

Communications and extension activities

Perhaps the most important part of B+LNZ's role in animal welfare is the provision of support and advice to our farmer levy payers. After all, there would be few benefits associated with research or codes of welfare if this information is not actively promoted to the farmers who look after the animals.

Accordingly, the B+LNZ website provides farmers with extensive access to advice and guidance in the form of welfare research briefs, fact sheets and relevant codes of welfare. Newsletters and other materials are also supplied to farmers, which frequently contain items of welfare relevance, for example information on stock care distributed in anticipation of adverse weather events.

It is, however, through our regional presence that B+LNZ is able to actively promote good stock welfare as part of efficient, productive sheep and beef farming. This encompasses:

Extension activities: B+LNZ maintains a network of regional extension managers who co-ordinate technology transfer events and demonstrations within their region and provide technical advice and support to producers on-farm.

B+LNZ Farmer Council: these are groups of farmers from each region that help set priorities for extension activities and are also able to serve as our grass roots network for taking publications like the codes of welfare and 'getting them out there'. The council is also a particularly useful sounding board, able to authoritatively comment on industry practices and gauge the appropriateness of communications material for a farmer audience.

Monitor farms: the monitor farm initiative is operated at the regional level and seeks to improve the profitability of participant farms through encouraging adoption of new techniques and monitoring progress over time. Advice is provided to participating farm businesses from a group of other local farmers, and often agribusiness consultants and vets, who are brought together to form an advisory group. Welfare best practice is one of a host of other facets of productive farming that are part of the monitor farm programme - by improving farm practices and productivity, significant benefits for the welfare of stock can be achieved.

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